

A TONEWOOD PRIMER | BEN HARPER | CINDY LEE BERRYHILL

# ACOUSTIC GUITAR

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## BILLY BRAGG & JOE HENRY

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AMERICA

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CHORD MELODIES

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Rock Island Line

BEN HARPER  
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3 SONGS

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A WATERLOO  
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p. 78







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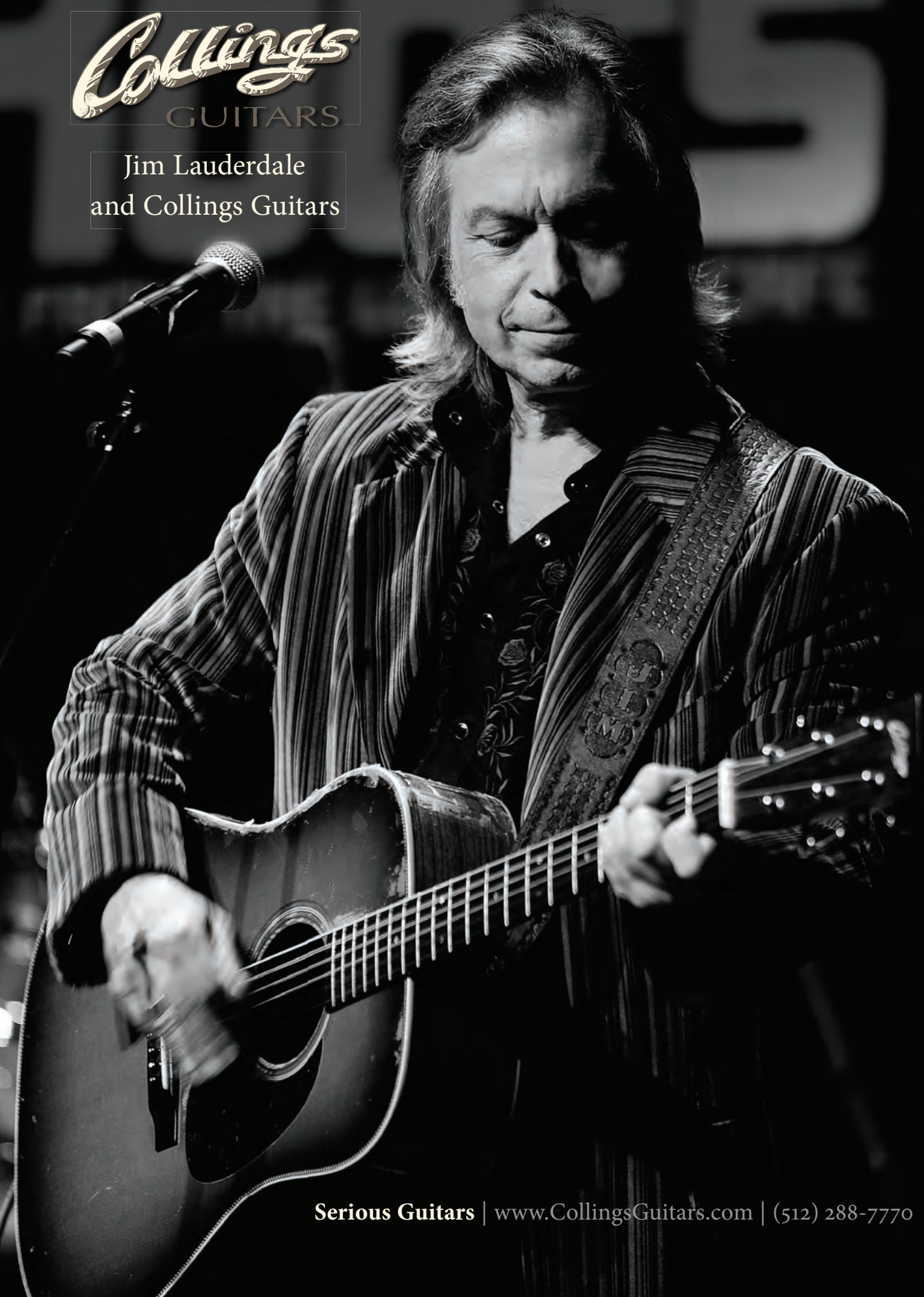


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**BEN HARPER**, p. 50

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Billy Bragg and Joe Henry

**Photographer**

Jacob Blickenstaff



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AG ONLINE



## Eric Skye and Mark Goldenberg

In the Studio

Enjoy a recent installment of *Acoustic Guitar Sessions* with dynamic guitar duo Eric Skye and Mark Goldenberg—and read about their dazzling fingerboard work in this issue's feature on guitar duos beginning on page 38. Visit [acousticguitar.com/sessions](http://acousticguitar.com/sessions) to check out more of AG's performance series, featuring the Wainwright Sisters, Richard Thompson, Milk Carton Kids, Ani DiFranco, Seth Avett, Otis Taylor, Peter Rowan, Della Mae, Bruce Cockburn, Indigo Girls, Valerie June, Brothers Comatose, Eliza Gilkyson, Laurie Lewis, and many others.



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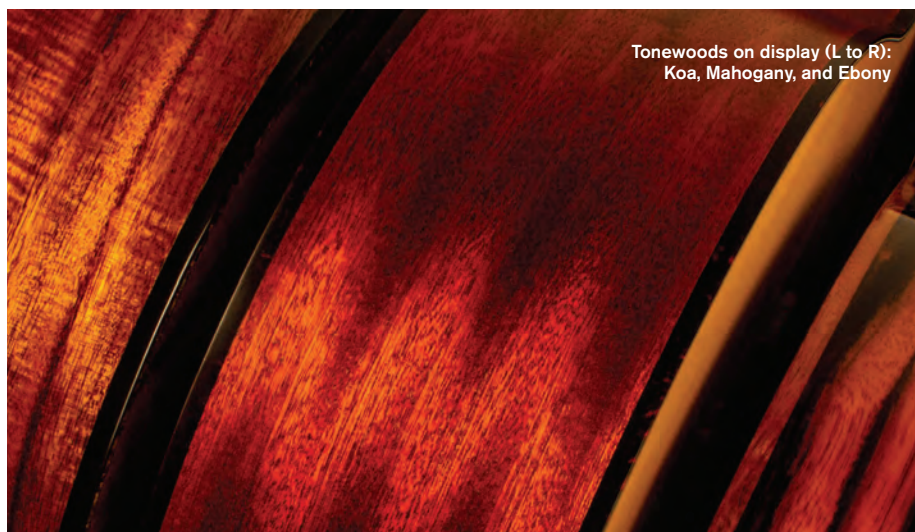
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Tonewoods on display (L to R):  
Koa, Mahogany, and Ebony

What's the best tonewood? That's a loaded question. As *AG* contributing editor Adam Perlmutter points out in this month's tonewood primer, on page 20, a guitar's design has more influence on its sound than the tonewoods used to build it. Though rosewood, for example, generally has a stronger bass response than mahogany, a mahogany dreadnought can easily have a more impressive bottom end than, say, a rosewood parlor guitar. Still, it's always good to be informed about the basic tonal characteristics of the various tonewoods, and this primer is a good place to start.

It's also important for dedicated acoustic guitarists to understand forest-management and sustainability issues related to the most rare, and even the most common, tonewoods. Thus, in this special focus section, environmental writer Patrick Sullivan reports on Musicians for Forests, a new organization created by guitar manufacturer Tom Bedell of Oregon-based Bedell Guitars. That organization is lining up support for its effort to stop the clear-cutting of Sitka spruce in the Tongass National Forest in Alaska. It's a campaign that deserves public awareness.

Alli Harvey, an Alaska-based Sierra Club representative campaigning against clear-cutting in the Tongass, told *AG* she is not aware of

any previous effort to get guitar manufacturers involved in the issue. However, a few years ago, Martin Guitars CEO Chris Martin, Taylor Guitars' CEO Bob Taylor, and Gibson Guitars president Dave Berryman traveled together to the area with Greenpeace's Musicwood Coalition to try and persuade Sealaska, the largest non-federal landholder in southeast Alaska, to slow down its clear-cutting. The trip was documented in the film *Musicwood*, which also included appearances by several guitarists, including Steve Earle and Kaki King.

With sales of acoustic guitars exceeding the number of electric guitars purchased in the United States, there is mounting demand for a dwindling supply of tonewood, though guitar builders are turning to such peripheral species as Lutz spruce and salvaged old-growth logs (see *Great Acoustics* on p. 94), as well as carbon fiber and other synthetic materials.

Elsewhere, you'll find a feature on a new album by Billy Bragg and Joe Henry recorded during a trans-continental train ride; a conversation between singer-songwriter Christopher Paul Stelling and Ben Harper; a profile of three guitar duos; lessons; gear; news; CD reviews; and more.

Play on.

—Greg Cahill

**Correction:** The September issue omitted a large portion of the "Crazy Blues" notation. The entire song, with video, can be found at [AcousticGuitar.com/category/lesson](http://AcousticGuitar.com/category/lesson).



[AcousticGuitar.com](http://AcousticGuitar.com)

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## FINANCE & OPERATIONS

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**Bookkeeper** Geneva Thompson

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**General Inquiries** [FrontDesk@Stringletter.com](mailto:FrontDesk@Stringletter.com)

**Customer Service**

[Help@AcousticGuitarService.com](mailto:Help@AcousticGuitarService.com)

**Advertising Inquiries**

[Marketing.Services@Stringletter.com](mailto:Marketing.Services@Stringletter.com)

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**Front Desk** (510) 215-0010

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**Secure Fax** (510) 231-8964

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# DECOY

## LTD 2016



**LTD2016 DECOY** Body size: FXC. Top and back: Flame Maple (arched). Sides: Flame Maple. Neck: Maple. Fingerboard: Ebony. Inlay: Watermelon Fish. Binding: Ivoroid. Purfling: Abalone. Finish: Gloss Green-Blue Burst. Hardware: Gold. Nut width: 42.5 mm. Nut and Saddle: Bone. Electronics: Palathetic Pickup with CTP-3 CoolTube Preamp.



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New Woody Guthrie  
book '26 songs in  
30 days'

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family reunion

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**5 Minutes With...**  
Jesca Hoop rises  
above the 'loner  
stoop'

# SETUP



**GUITAR TALK**

JOHN HANCOCK

## Teach Your Children

**And take your own playing to the next level**

BY CINDY LEE BERRYHILL

*Editor's note: Cindy Lee Berryhill began her career as a cofounder of the mid-1980s New York City antifolk movement. But after two albums in the late-'80s she moved on from that ragtag group of punk-inspired folkies that would later go global and launch the careers of Beck, the Moldy Peaches, and Regina Spektor. By the turn of the decade, Berryhill had returned to her*

*native Southern California, where she began creating sprawling, highly arranged, orchestral albums—but retaining the acoustic focus—inspired more by Brian Wilson than Woody Guthrie or Joe Strummer. That meant Berryhill needed to graduate from a loud-fast-hard acoustic strummer to an advanced guitarist who could do intricate interplay with cellos, timpani,*

*and vibraphone. In this edition of Guitar Talk, Berryhill tells how she made the transition.*

**I**f you go back and listen to my earliest albums, *Who's Gonna Save the World* and *Naked Movie Star*, I'm a strummer. In the early days of antifolk, we were all about being vigorous strummers. We wanted to be loud,





simple, hard—and break lots of strings. We were folkies, but we were punks at heart.

But that gets old.

At a certain point you get tired of strumming. I knew that I could do other things, but I couldn't do as much as I wanted to do. I'd sit down and play and get frustrated: How come I'm not playing more riffs?

About 14 years ago, I started teaching guitar, and that's when I started seeing the change in my playing. I always could read music—I learned to play classical music as a kid—so I could teach that with no problem. But the kids I was teaching wanted to learn specific stuff—they wanted to learn AC/DC, so I'd have to learn AC/DC riffs, or they wanted to learn a Beatles song, so I'd have to learn Beatles songs.

I also had to learn how to read tab, which we didn't do when I was a kid. The only people I knew who knew tab when I was starting out were

new tunings. Everything just stepped up several notches. It was quite a transition, and it's interesting when people see me who knew me back in the antifolk days. They're like, "What happened to your guitar playing?" And I say, "You know what? I have to play every day." But it's not like, "Oh, God, it's practice time." It's more like, "Oh, wow, this kid wants to learn how to play 'Dear God' by XTC," so I have to figure that out. And then I learn more about a song I've known for years: Oh, that's such a great descending line on the bass! It takes the Beatles' "Dear Prudence" descending line and

sort of turns it on its head and adds some other parts to it. It's pretty much the same thing, but reinvented. I could do that, too!

It's been interesting getting out over the last couple of years and playing guitar with people, because I was not used to people coming up to me and saying, "Your guitar playing puts me to shame." But I actually heard that recently. And it was amazing.

*Cindy Lee Berryhill's forthcoming album, The Adventurist, is due out on Omnivore Records in Spring 2017.*

## If you want to become a better guitar player, start teaching kids. It can be kids on your block. Or it can be kids at the local music store. Kids challenge you.

bluegrass players. We learned by reading notes. You'd buy guitar books and it was notes—it wasn't tab. So, I had to pull it together and learn how to read tablature and all these other things I hadn't learned before or that had changed from when I was first learning to play.

By teaching kids riffs instead of just chords, I started to get comfortable with playing riffs myself. I'd go to parties and play a couple of songs and my friends would be like, "Whoa! What happened? You're playing 'Cinnamon Girl'?" Dang! You've gotten so much better on the guitar." And I hadn't realized it. It hadn't occurred to me that my own guitar playing had stepped up several notches along with the kids I was teaching.

So, my main message for players who are tired of strumming is this: If you want to become a better guitar player, start teaching. It can be kids on your block. Or it can be kids at the local music store. Kids challenge you. Teaching gets you out of your comfort zone, and that's what I needed to do.

The icing on the cake is that as I became more comfortable with riffs and other non-strumming techniques, I started writing new riffs for my own songs and my songwriting improved. So then I started coming up with



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## 26 Songs in 30 Days

New book reveals the history of Woody Guthrie's Columbia River songs

BY PAT MORAN

In May 1941, Woody Guthrie walked into the Bonneville Power Administration office in Portland, Oregon—bearded, unkempt, and clutching a guitar. “The Department of Interior folks got ahold of me,” Guthrie wrote. “[They] took me into a clothes closet and melted my songs down onto records.”

Guthrie's fertile 30-day sojourn in the Pacific Northwest, when he road-tripped throughout the Columbia River basin—composing 26 songs celebrating the rugged landscape, the majestic river, and the Grand Coulee Dam's promise of prosperity through irrigation and affordable electricity—is the subject of the new book *26 Songs in 30 Days: Woody Guthrie's Columbia River Songs and the Planned Promised Land in the Pacific Northwest* (Sasquatch Books).

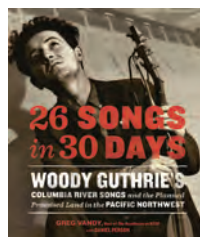
“It's difficult to describe this one-month period in his life because there are no photographs or records,” says co-author Greg Vandy, who hosts KEXP radio's roots music show *The Roadhouse*. Even the recordings were thought lost, until acetate copies made by agency employees were discovered in the 1980s.

The Columbia River song cycle includes classics such as “Roll on Columbia,” “The

Biggest Thing that Man Has Ever Done,” and “Pastures of Plenty,” and Guthrie completed it for the princely sum of \$266.66.

“My father needed the job,” says Nora Guthrie (Vandy consulted the Woody Guthrie Foundation during research for his book). According to Nora, Woody had just walked off a top-paying job at CBS radio in New York due to censorship. “He was out of work, with a wife and three babies in tow, (when) the government said, ‘Write your own songs.’ No one told him what he could or couldn't say.”

Vandy adds, “Woody was primarily concerned with alleviating the suffering brought on by drought and depression.” Guthrie believed that fertile land and electric power provided by the Columbia River project would benefit displaced Okies, who he memorialized on his 1940 album *Dust Bowl Ballads*. The Columbia River songs are Guthrie's direct answers and optimistic solutions to those harrowing, hardscrabble



**26 Songs in 30 Days: Woody Guthrie's Columbia River Songs and the Planned Promised Land in the Pacific Northwest**  
By Greg Vandy with Daniel Person  
(Sasquatch Books)

dustbowl tunes, Vandy maintains. “‘Pastures of Plenty,’ arguably the greatest folk song ever written, is about the migrant experience and the idea that all share this land, but it is also an actual place [the Grand Coulee Dam],” Vandy says. A gravity dam on the Columbia River in Washington State, the Grand Coulee was completed in 1942 in the Columbia basin, transforming what was once a great desert into “pastures of plenty.”

The BPA's public works success is forever preserved in popular culture thanks to Guthrie.

“Three years ago I was at the opening of the David Bowie exhibit in Berlin,” Nora Guthrie says. “I put on the headset, and I hear ‘Roll on Columbia.’ The first panel of the exhibit is about how Bowie grew up with Lonnie Donegan singing that song and ‘Grand Coulee Dam’ on TV. All these teenagers—John Lennon, Paul McCartney, and David Bowie—they were hearing Woody's songs, and that's why they took up guitars.”

AC



# CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK



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**T**he Woodstock Invitational Luthiers Showcase, an annual gathering for acoustic stringed-instrument builders, players, collectors, and aficionados in Woodstock, New York, is back for its eighth year on October 21–23.

Though the primary focus of the intimate three-day affair is the acoustic instruments themselves—their beauty, construction, and the dozens of talented builders who dream them up—a strong community aspect keeps people coming back each year. The world of acoustic-guitar festivals may be small, but the Woodstock Invitational has carved out a reputation as an internationally-known gathering with a far reach and a deep respect for the maker and music communities.

“We are really looking forward to taking part this year,” says **Ryan Fitzsimmons** of **Bourgeois Guitars**, a first-time attendee. “It’s an important event for the community of luthiers at large, and a rare opportunity to socialize and exchange ideas with old friends and young talent alike.”

Among the 50-plus exhibitors are such renowned builders as **Erich Solomon** of **Solomon Guitars** and **Linda Manzer** of **Manzer Guitars** (*Acoustic Guitar* magazine is a co-sponsor of the event).

“I think it’s as much fun for the guitar makers displaying their guitars as it is for the players,” Manzer says. “It’s casual and accessible and fun. For me, it’s like taking a holiday. And of course Woodstock, New York, is absolutely beautiful and the people at the show are just wonderful—it’s a very special show.”

The weekend also incorporates tonewood dealers, parts and tool suppliers, string and accessories manufacturers, lutherie services, instructional materials, and more, as well as a program of live music, mini-concerts, demos, clinics, and workshops. Topping off the festivities on Saturday is a special String Sampler Concert with headliner **Jerry Douglas** at the Woodstock Playhouse. Other renowned guests include pre-eminent French-Algerian guitarist, singer, and composer **Pierre Bensusan** and celebrated jazz guitarists **Bucky Pizzarelli** and **Ed Laub**.

**Baker Rorick**, founder and producer of the showcase, told the *Woodstock Times* last year: “[I]t’s about this wonderful community of builders, who all work in solitude all year long, and there’s few occasions like this when they can all get together and meet their peers and they’re all happy as puppy dogs to see each other.”

For more information, visit [woodstockinvitational.com](http://woodstockinvitational.com). —Anna Pulley

## MARTIN UNVEILS NEW DREADNOUGHTS

C.F. Martin & Co. has released two new dreadnought models, the **D-1 Authentic 1931** and the **CS-Bluegrass-16**, continuing its year-long centennial celebration of the big-bodied, six-string guitar. Unveiled at **Summer NAMM 2016** in Nashville, the 12-fret D-1 Authentic 1931 (\$6,999) is based on the first Martin-branded dreadnought, while the CS-Bluegrass-16 (\$7,999) is inspired by pre-WWII, D-28 “Herringbone” Martins. The D-1 Authentic 1931 remains true to its origins with hide glue construction, vintage gloss finish, thermally cured Adirondack spruce top, and mahogany back and sides. The CS-Bluegrass-16—limited to 100 copies—features an Adirondack spruce top and Guatemalan rosewood back and sides with hide glue construction, plus a Herringbone top inlay, large soundhole, antique top toner, grained ivoroid binding, and ebony fingerboard and bridge. —Whitney Phaneuf

## ELLIOTT CAPOS EXPANDS

**Elliott Capos** has been making capos by hand in its family-run shop in Texas since 1975. This year, the Brenham-based company expanded from a tiny backyard shop with five employees—including founder and creator **Phill Elliott**—to a larger facility with seven employees and a new custom-built laser cut machine set to increase production and productivity.

At **Summer NAMM 2016** in Nashville, the company debuted its Integrity model and CEO **Scott Elliott** demonstrated the “push button” design invented and patented by his father **Phill**. An accomplished guitarist, **Phill** had the idea for a new kind of capo, seeking a design that would not interfere with his fretting hand while playing. Unable to find such a capo, he headed to a machine shop and began experimenting. The company grew organically from there, from **Phill** giving away his capos or selling at cost to a full-time operation and family business. With the expansion, **Scott Elliott** says the company will finally be able to keep up with demand for its capos, which range from \$99.95 to \$235. —W.P.





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# California Girl

**Jesca Hoop rises above the 'loner stoop'**

BY DAVID TEMPLETON

Jesca Hoop wipes away an abrupt flood of tears. "F\*ck, I'm getting emotional already," the singer-songwriter exclaims from the tiny performance area at the Main Stage West theater in Sebastopol, California.

Hoop—originally from nearby Santa Rosa, but now a resident of Manchester, England—is only one song into her first hometown concert in years. "There were times, back when I used to haunt the streets around here, when I thought I'd be happy to leave and never come back," she murmurs, her tears glowing under the stage lights. "But, right now, I'm just so happy to see all those familiar faces."

Hoop is in the United States to perform songs from her new album, *Love Letter for Fire* (Sub Pop), recorded with Iron & Wine's Sam Beam. The collection of love songs is a moody, heartfelt, and thoroughly lovely follow-up to Hoop's previous indie gems: *Kismet*, her debut released in 2007, *Hunting My Dress* (2009), and *The House That Jack Built* (2012). *Love Letter* has been earning Hoop some of her best plaudits since Tom Waits said of her musical style, "She is an old soul, like a black pearl, a good witch or a red moon. Her music is like going swimming in a lake at night."

Before she took the stage for her emotional homecoming, Hoop gave *Acoustic Guitar* five minutes to talk guitars and songwriting.

**You grew up in Sonoma County, where you learned to write songs and play the guitar.**

**How does Northern California figure into who you are as a songwriter?**

Well, I'm a true California girl, through and through, and I'll always be proud of that. I do think there's a bit of DNA from the pot-smoking, skateboarding underachiever I used to be in all of my songs. I grew up in the '80s, the age of innocence and freedom, and that's in there as well.

**How would you describe the particular style and sound of your songwriting?**

My songs are a little off-kilter, and emotionally rich.



**'She is an old soul, like a black pearl, a good witch or a red moon.'**

**TOM WAITS**

**How and when did you start writing songs?**

Gradually. When? As a teenager at Santa Rosa High School, waiting out on the Loner Stoop outside the school's theater. The Loner Stoop. That's what I used to call the spot outside of Mr. Craven's theater class. It was kind of my safe space.

**Your guitar playing style is stripped down and percussive. How would you describe it?**

[Laughing] I would call my guitar style . . .

naïve. I know that. While I do think my songwriting, and the arrangements of my songs, are solidly in the sophisticated realm, I would say that my guitar playing will never make it past the third grade.

**Did you have any inkling then that, 20-plus years later, you'd be where you are today?**

F\*ck no. There wasn't a thread of ambition in me back then. I had no focus, no goals, no orientation. Mr. Craven, to be honest, was part of the process that led me to understand I was wasting my gifts. I wish every artist had someone like him, someone to lead them back to what you are supposed to be doing, which in my case, of course, was writing and singing songs.

AC



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*Britton from Hattiesburg, MS*

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PHOTO BY JEREMIAH JANG



Special Focus: Tonewoods

# A TONEWOOD PRIMER

How to find the right materials  
for your optimal sound

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

Southern California guitar maker Isaac Jang taps a spruce plate to listen for tonal characteristics



**T**here was a time when guitars sported a limited range of tonewoods, when steel-string players paid little mind to their distinctions, other than financial considerations. A guitarist flush with cash might opt for an instrument with a spruce top and rosewood back and sides, while one with lesser means would go for plain mahogany back and sides, and a player with even less cash, or a beginner, might choose an unadorned all-mahogany instrument.

But as the steel-string guitar has evolved, luthiers and players alike have become more attuned to the sonic characteristics inherent to different tonewoods. On the other hand, supplies of premium tonewoods have been diminishing due to increased demand, land development, and poor forest management. That's led to the use of sustainable woods for more than a decade, Martin Guitar, for example, has offered models built with woods certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). In response to this unfortunate, but predictable, situation, but partly out of pure experimentation, builders also have sought alternative tonewoods, or, in some instances, they've used such synthetics as carbon fiber. The San Francisco-based Blackbird Guitars, for example, has even created a highly resonant, proprietary plant-based synthetic called Ekoa.

Indeed, tonewood options are expansive. Major acoustic guitar companies, like Taylor Guitars and Martin & Co., now offer dozens of standard tonewood choices—solid woods, laminates, and synthetics—while a major supplier like Luthiers Mercantile International carries scores of options, including increasingly popular thermally cured soundboards (see Glossary on p. 23).

There are many variables to consider.

"Differences between woods can be as mysterious and complex as differences between people," Maine luthier and AG contributor Dana Bourgeois has written in this magazine. "Even within a species, no two pieces of wood are exactly alike. Environmental conditions, genetics, the age of the tree,

annular growth patterns, grain orientation, curing conditions, and so on all have an effect on the tonal properties in a piece of wood. In addition, tonewoods respond differently in the hands of different makers. They can also take on different characteristics when used in different models of guitars—even those built by the same maker.

"Whether a particular wood sounds good or bad depends partially upon who's doing the listening. So any attempt to sort out distinctions between tonewoods can only be offered from a relatively subjective point of view."

This presents an interesting conundrum for the acoustic guitarist—what are the perfect woods for your sound? If you find yourself in this position, this tonewood primer should help steer you in the right direction to realize your musical vision. Of course, you'll want to play, and listen to, as many different options as possible before choosing your dream guitar.

## The All-Important Soundboard

The top or soundboard, as the name suggests, bears more influence on the way a guitar sounds than any other component, though the back also is a key component. "In general terms, the top seems to affect the guitar's responsiveness, the quickness of its attack, its sustain, some of its overtone coloration, and the strength and quality of each note's fundamental tone," Bourgeois notes. "Most luthiers, but not all, believe that the wood chosen for the top is the single overriding variable that determines the quality of tone of a finished instrument."

Spruce is the most common tonewood for the steel-string soundboard (there are a half dozen species in the Northern Hemisphere). Sitka, which grows in coastal rainforests in the Pacific Northwest, is used most often, though such manufacturers as Taylor Guitars have introduced Lutz spruce, a hybrid of Sitka and white spruce that reportedly has some of same tonal characteristics of Adirondack spruce.

**A spruce soundboard on a new guitar can have a bit of edge to its tone, and many players like the way it starts to open up with playing time.**

### SITKA SPRUCE

Arguably the most common tonewood, Sitka is a well-rounded tonewood, one suited for many styles of playing. It's known for its tight grain pattern and its high stiffness and relative lightness, translating to a broad dynamic range that stands up well when strummed heartily. At the same time, it's also quite responsive to fingerpicking, though a light touch may result in a thin sound. Sitka tends to have stronger fundamentals than overtones, and this means that it can sound not quite as robust when played with the lightest touch. "Sitka is the most consistently available, good-quality spruce there is, and that's why we use it as stock on the majority of our guitars," says Dick Boak, director of the museum and archives at Martin & Co.

**Examples: Taylor 914; Breedlove Pursuit; Martin GPCPA5**

### ENGELMANN SPRUCE

Engelmann spruce, which also grows in western North America, is a common alternative to Sitka. Because it is in lesser supply than Sitka, Engelmann often costs more. It's a lighter and less stiff variety than Sitka, and it has stronger overtones and weaker fundamentals. An Engelmann top typically has less headroom than one made from Sitka, and its sound can suffer a little when played loudly. "Engelmann is a good choice for players who want a more complex sound when playing softly," says Bourgeois, adding that European spruce shares characteristics with Engelmann, but has more headroom, making it ideal for players with a stronger attack.

**Examples: Yamaha CG122MS Classical; Collings OM2HE Engelmann**

#### SITKA SPRUCE



#### ENGELMANN SPRUCE



#### LUTZ SPRUCE



#### ADIRONDACK SPRUCE



#### RED CEDAR







The Gibson Hummingbird Vintage model has a torrefied Adirondack top

### LUTZ SPRUCE

When Taylor Guitar redesigned its popular 700 series this summer, the company turned to Lutz spruce, a natural hybrid of Sitka and white spruce that provides a higher volume ceiling. Taylor is no stranger to Lutz; the world's largest acoustic-guitar manufacturer introduced this tonewood into its lineup in January with the revoiced 500 series. According to Pacific Rim Tonewoods, it grows naturally in a relatively small area in Central British Columbia and the Alaskan panhandle. The supplier hails Lutz spruce for its "hybrid vigor."

**Examples:** Taylor 712ce;  
Halcyon NL-00 Walnut Lutz Spruce

### ADIRONDACK SPRUCE

Adirondack, or Eastern red spruce, named after its ruddy coloring, grows in the Adirondack Mountains and in the cool forests of the Northeast. It is the king of spruces. Prior to World War II, it was the soundboard tonewood of choice for Martin and other makers. But overharvesting of this wood led to its being all but

phased out for use in guitars in the years after the war. For the most part, Adirondack spruce can be found on select high-end instruments. It's a relatively heavy and stiff wood, having strong fundamentals, but a greater overtone content than Sitka, and it tends to be the loudest and liveliest of spruces as well.

"Adirondack can be extremely wide-grained—as few as four grains per inch—and not as pretty as other spruces," Boak says. "But it has the uncanny ability to add complexity to the tone."

A spruce soundboard on a new guitar can have a bit of an edge to its tone, and many players like the way it starts to open up with playing time—something to take into account when auditioning any brand new spruce-topped instrument. Al Petteway, the master fingerstylist based in the Asheville, North Carolina area, says, "I'm not sure how much it has to do with the top aging and how much it has to do with the vibrations loosening it up. I've played vintage guitars that still sounded stiff because they were left in the case and never played and

### GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Fundamental vs. Overtones** A fundamental tone is the initial sound heard when you pick or pluck a note (and which decays at varying rates depending on the sustain); the overtones are complex harmonic layers that can make the note swell after the fundamental is initiated.

"The fundamental is the root frequency as a tone generator would make it," luthier Bruce Sexauer wrote on the Acoustic Guitar Forum. "So the fundamental of A 440 is exactly 440 cycles per second. Overtones [are] the harmonic sequence above the fundamental. The first is the harmonic fifth, then the octave, and then things get complicated. The higher [you] go up the series, the looser the direct relationship with the fundamental."

**Harmonic Content** A piece of wood is capable of producing a fundamental tone and an array of harmonics (which include overtones). Tapping a piece of wood reveals, not only the velocity of sound, but also harmonic content, clarity of tone, and high-, low-, and mid-bias.

**Sustain** Natural reverberation that results in a lasting, ringing tone.

**Torrefaction** A process in which the soundboard is thermally cured in an oxygen-free environment to alter the cellular structure of the wood in a manner that replicates an aged tone.

**Velocity of Sound** The speed at which a material transmits received energy. Lively materials—those with a high velocity of sound, or low internal damping—best facilitate the transmission of vibrational energy (sound waves oscillating from the bridge). To test velocity of sound, a luthier will hold a piece of wood at a nodal point and tap it to listen for the response.

#### MAHOGANY



#### KOA



#### MAPLE



#### ROSEWOOD



#### SAPELE





I've played guitars that are less than a year old that sounded awesome."

**Examples:** Gibson Hummingbird Vintage; Martin CEO-7; Blueridge BR-163A Top Craftsman Series

### WESTERN RED CEDAR

Though it's used more commonly for the soundboards of classical guitars, red cedar, growing in western North America, can make a great steel-string soundboard. This wood tends to have a honeyed color and is known for its sonically analogous dark and lush tone, and also for being generally less bass-y and projective than spruce. For these reasons, a cedar-topped guitar is a good choice for a fingerpicker (it's common on classical nylon-string guitars), but not necessarily a strummer with a heavy attack.

**Examples:** Taylor 714; Cordoba C9 Luthier Series; Seagull Guitars Coastline S12

### MAHOGANY & KOA

Hardwoods like koa, native to Hawaii, and mahogany, a Central and South American species, are sometimes used for soundboards, usually with backs and sides of the same material. These woods are low in overtones and sound very direct, with impressive mids. The combination of a mahogany soundboard with a back and sides of the same woods is midrange-rich and punchy and works especially well for country-blues fingerpicking.

**Examples:** Martin D-15M; Breedlove Pursuit Concert Koa

### MAPLE

Maple is occasionally used for soundboards, but more often for backs and sides, due to its flatness of sound and for its relative shortness of decay—an attribute that happens to make the wood more resistant to feedback in amplified situations than rosewood or mahogany. Not all builders find maple to be a suitable top material, though. "I wouldn't typically recommend maple as soundboard tonewood," says Andy Powers, Taylor Guitars' master luthier. "One of its singular characteristics is that it's almost



Left to right, Breedlove Pursuit Koa; Martin LE Cowboy, mahogany; Taylor 914, Indian rosewood; Eastman Grand Concert, sapele; Ortega Striped Suite, AAA striped ebony

perfectly transparent—it doesn't sound like anything, which isn't usually how you want a top to respond."

**Examples:** Fender T-Bucket 400 CE; Rayco Squareneck Resonator

## The Back & Sides

### ROSEWOODS

The back and sides contribute far less than the soundboard to a guitar's sound, but their composition is nonetheless important. Rosewood, which takes the name from its characteristic floral scent, is an ideal tonewood for backs and sides. "Rosewood is dense and heavy compared to other woods—almost so heavy that it sinks in water," Boak says. "And it produces extremely warm and resonant tones."

In no small part due to its use in classic Martin guitars, Brazilian rosewood has long been considered the Holy Grail. Native to southeastern Brazil's Atlantic Forest, this precious tonewood, also used for centuries in

high-end furniture, became difficult to source in dimensions large enough for guitar-making in the last half of the 20th century. Because of this, in 1969, Martin started using Indian rosewood instead of Brazilian.

While Brazilian rosewood has been offered in fancy instruments since then, both by guitar companies and independent luthiers, it has become even trickier to obtain. In 1992, it was added to the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species treaty, and then, in 2008, to the federal Lacey Act, which made it impossible to import Brazilian rosewood without a labyrinth of permits and paperwork. (Under those U.S. and international statutes, documentation is required to travel with a Brazilian rosewood guitar.)

Nonetheless, some U.S. guitar makers have Brazilian rosewood that pre-dates the ban and it's still used on costly reissue and boutique guitars. What makes Brazilian rosewood so appealing is its great beauty—its deep, variegated coloring and its spider-web figuring. But more important are its brilliant overtones,

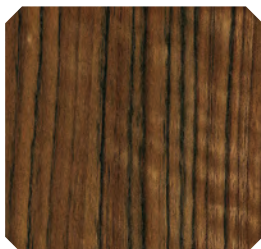
WALNUT



COCOBOLO



OVANKOL



EBONY



WENGÉ







**It's also important to remember that a guitar's design has more influence on its sound than the tonewoods used to build it.**

deep resonance, and impressive sustain, its penetrating basses and crystalline trebles. "Brazilian rosewood is so rich and ring-y, and it has such a big range of workability, that no matter how it's used it yields pleasing musical results," Bourgeois says.

East Indian rosewood—sometimes referred to just as Indian rosewood—is native to the tropical monsoon forests of southeast India and is much easier to source than its Brazilian counterpart. That's why it's used in the vast majority of new rosewood guitars. Indian rosewood is a versatile tonewood, equally good for flatpicking and fingerpicking, with scooped mids, a deep low-end, and bright high end. Its sparkling sound makes it a great substitute for Brazilian rosewood. "Indian rosewood has a lot of the same characteristics of Brazilian rosewood—but just a

little less of everything," Bourgeois says.

Some less common alternatives to Brazilian rosewood, which share some of that prized tonewood's winning qualities, include Honduran, Guatemalan, and Madagascar rosewood, as well as cocobolo, granadillo, ovankol, wenge, and ziricote, among others. "Honduran is my personal favorite," Boak says. "The tree doesn't grow very large, and it's hard to find supplies sufficient for a two-piece back. Martin actually used to cut Honduran rosewood logs for Musser, a premier maker of marimbas. The wood rings like nothing else when it's hit with the right type of mallet, and whenever we use it on a custom guitar, the results are quite extraordinary."

While rosewoods might sound amazing, a guitar made from this species, with its complex overtones and sustain, can present headaches for a recording engineer. An instrument whose sonic spectrum is cluttered is more difficult to record than one with a comparably direct sound. So, in the studio, mahogany backs and sides can be preferable to rosewood.

**Examples:** Taylor 416-R; Gibson J-45; Martin D-16RGT

**MAHOGANY**

Honduran mahogany, (also called Honduras mahogany, big-leaf mahogany, or simply mahogany) has a warm and woody sound, high in midrange content, that's dissimilar to rosewood. It's characterized by a relative high velocity of sound and strong fundamental content, though it lacks rosewood's brilliant ringing overtones, making it a good choice for a player who wants a clear, direct sound, and for recording in general. "Mahogany is quite light compared to rosewood, and sonically, with its airy crispness, it's kind of the opposite of rosewood," Boak says.

While mahogany is much easier to source than Brazilian rosewood, it's still an endangered species, due largely to illegal logging. And so guitar makers have sought sustainable alternatives. An inexpensive option like sapele, for instance, which is sometimes called Africa mahogany, behaves a lot like Honduran, but adds a little treble shimmer. Khaya, another mahogany substitute, is also known for its brightness.

**Examples:** Martin 000-15M; Guild M-20

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## FRETBOARDS & BRIDGES

Players of electric guitars with bolt-on necks have long been hip to the fact that neck and fretboard materials can have a significant bearing on tone. **Maple** necks can impart a bright, poppy tone that can do much to reinforce the top end of a large-bodied guitar, while **mahogany** necks help push the overall palette into a warmer, more woody tonal range.

Fretboard materials also exert an influence on overall tone, although they probably act more as icing on the cake than as a layer of the cake itself. **Brazilian rosewood** fretboards and their denser rainforest counterparts add sparkle and ring, and **Indian rosewood** fretboards can help fatten up the midrange. **Wenge**, a dense, dark-colored African hardwood unrelated to the rosewoods, has tonal properties remarkably similar to those of Brazilian rosewood.

**Ebony**, the traditional fingerboard material found on violins, classical guitars, and high-end steel strings, has the lowest velocity of sound of all the woods commonly used in lutherie and has definite damping characteristics. This may not be much of a problem for large-bodied guitars made of red spruce or Brazilian rosewood, but it may be something to consider when designing smaller guitars, particularly those using some of the less resonant woods for tops and backs.

Bridge materials, like fretboards, cannot make or break an instrument, but they serve to enhance or edit the tonal contributions of other materials found on the guitar. The woods discussed above—ebony, Brazilian rosewood, and Indian rosewood—contribute similar tonal qualities when they are used as bridge materials as when they are used for fretboards.

It is important to remember that wood, when considered generically, can be responsible only for certain aspects of the tone of any guitar. Equally important are the design of the guitar, the skill of the maker, and the quality of the individual pieces of wood from which the guitar is made. Species selection can, however, be a determining factor in the creation of a very special guitar or a guitar designed for a specific purpose.

— Dana Bourgeois

*Excerpted from the 1994 Acoustic Guitar article "Tapping Tonewoods."*



Gibson J-200 with  
figured maple back and sides

## SAPELE

Comparable to mahogany with consistent, balanced tone, this African tonewood is sometimes seen as the poor-man's mahogany (Martin sometimes offers it as a substitute on the company's popular 000-15M model)—it is slightly denser than mahogany and produces a brighter tone. But overall, sapele is known for warm resonance and good projection.

**Examples:** Martin DRS-1; Taylor 'Baby Taylor'

## OVANKOL

This African relative of rosewood shares many of its tonal properties, and it is sometimes known as African rosewood. Its color ranges from yellowish to reddish brown to darker gray with black stripes, resulting in an attractive grain with an attractive flame. It has the same bass and treble as rosewood, but a bit more mid-range.

**Examples:** Taylor 410

## KOA

Falling between rosewood and mahogany is koa—a tonewood Martin first used on guitars in 1917, as a craze for all things Hawaiian swept across America. Koa is native to Hawaii and is used commonly on ukuleles, but less so on guitars. It's prized for its rich golden coloring, curly figuring, and agreeable sound. "In my estimation koa splits the difference nicely between rosewood and mahogany," Boak says. "It exhibits some of the warmth of rosewood and some of the breath of mahogany."

**Taylor K24ce Koa ES2 Grand Auditorium;  
Dean Exotica Koa**

## MAPLE

An excellent North American tonewood for back and sides is maple, Eastern hard-rock and Western big-leaf maple being the most commonly used types. A couple of years ago, Taylor Guitars expanded its use of maple on backs and sides, and has undertaken an active maple reforestation program. Maple is celebrated both for its range of figuring patterns—from curly or flamed to quilt to birdseye, which add beauty to an instrument—and for its transparency of sound, which reflects the sound of the top but doesn't so much color it. Maple can be loud and projective. "I've owned three guitars with flamed maple back and sides," says Petteway. "They were all awesome. I've always felt maple is a great-sounding wood. After all, it's what's been used on stringed orchestral instruments for centuries."

**Gibson J-200; Taylor 616**

## WALNUT

Historically, walnut hasn't seen widespread use among guitar makers, but there are notable exceptions, like certain Epiphone archtops from the 1930s. It's used increasingly in modern guitars, though. Claro walnut can have a striking figuring that lends eye candy to a fine guitar. Walnut behaves similarly to maple, though it has its detractors. "To my ear, walnut has a warm and very dark tone—sometimes too dark. I'm not really fond of walnut, although it sometimes pleasantly surprises me," Boak says.

**Examples:** Larrivee L-03 Walnut Acoustic Guitar; Gibson 2016 SJ-100 Walnut Jumbo



A close-up, artistic photograph of a person's hands playing a Yamaha TransAcoustic guitar. The guitar has a warm, orange-brown finish and a dark fretboard. The person is wearing a white shirt and olive green pants. The background is a warm, out-of-focus interior space.

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## COCOBOLO

With its spice-like scent and far-ranging coloration (with deep, black grain), this Central American relative of rosewood is known as the “piano of tonewoods,” since it produces a bright, sparkling tone that accentuates the treble. Regarded as one of the world’s finest tropical woods, cocobolo grew increasingly popular after the 1912 opening of the Panama Canal made its transport easier.

**Examples:** Martin Custom Shop 000-14;  
Luna Vista Wolf Grand Auditorium

## Alternative Woods & Synthetics

Tradition casts such a strong spell in the guitar world, especially among high-end instruments, that it is difficult for a “new wood” to gain any sort of status recognition. “Adventurous luthiers do find and use exciting new woods, but rarely are the woods feasible options for manufacturers because, even if they are sustainably harvested and non-threatened, they are scarce, or the trees are rarely large enough for guitar plates, or they require additional care during the building process,” says Chris Herrod, LMI’s sales manager, on alternative tonewoods.

“Frankly,” he says, “the outlook for exotic, especially tropical, wood sources grows more and more bleak every year and we are not seeing a newcomer emerge that will fill in for fading species and heroically save the day. The future, in my opinion, will not rest on new woods defining the value of a guitar so much as a fresh appreciation of tonal nuance and power—along with an increased capacity to communicate effectively about it—and for the artistry and execution of fine woodworking and ornamentation on the guitar.”

With that in mind, the door will be opened for acceptance of four-piece tops and backs, less ornate woods, laminates, and composite materials (Nomex or honey-combed tops, other non-wood materials) and for tempered (“cooked”) and otherwise treated woods—even in high-end, heirloom-quality guitars.

**Examples:** Rainsong Black Ice Series;  
Kevin Michael Touring Carbon Fiber;  
Martin 000X1AE; Blackbird EI Capitan

## LAMINATES: TO LAYER OR NOT TO LAYER

A layered or laminated tonewood is one in which several thin sheets of wood are glued together to form a material that’s inexpensive and durable to work with. Layered tonewoods sound less complex than their



Martin Macassar  
with macassar-patterned  
high-pressure laminate  
back and sides

solid-wood counterparts and are generally reserved for budget and import guitars, with the exception of high-quality electric guitars, like those in Gibson’s classic ES (Electric Spanish) series.

The main benefit of buying a guitar with layered tonewoods is that it will have an attractive price—and often visually pleasing outer layers on those woods. And then there’s the green thing: by definition, laminates help guitar makers make the most efficient use of precious materials from the forest.

The least expensive guitars have bodies made entirely from laminated tonewoods, but many good-quality, affordable options pair solid soundboards with layered backs and sides. Given how much more a soundboard impacts a guitar’s sound and performance than do its back and sides, this is a very good compromise.

**Examples:** Taylor GS Mini;  
Martin & Co. LX ‘Little Martin’

## SALVAGED & SUSTAINABLE OLD-GROWTH TONEWOODS

As supplies of classic tonewoods like spruce, rosewood, and mahogany are being threatened, luthiers and guitar companies look to sustainable alternatives such as salvaged woods. All of the Sitka spruce used in soundboards by Bedell Guitars, for instance, comes from trees that have fallen or are dead in Alaskan forests (see “Good Wood,” p. 30).

As for harvesting tonewoods sustainably, Taylor Guitars has taken important steps in this direction. For its 600 series, the company uses North American maple, grown in healthy

forests with good stewardship, ensuring that it will be available for generations to come. This maple is supplied by Pacific Rim Tonewoods, a company with thoughtful practices when it comes to sourcing and preparing woods for musical instruments. The company also is planting its own maple forests, as well as stands of koa on the Hawaiian islands.

In a more ambitious development, in 2011 Taylor bought an ebony mill in Cameroon, Africa, and is now the world’s biggest legal producer of that wood, used most often for fingerboards and bridges. The ebony market has long been plagued with irresponsible and wasteful forestry, compounded by corruption, and Taylor is working to operate cleanly in a way that ensures ebony’s survival.

Sinker wood—logs that long ago fell to the bottoms of rivers or lakes when being transported for milling purposes—is another source that precludes the harvesting of new tress. Huss & Dalton, for example, has built guitars using old-growth mahogany discovered in the river bottoms of Belize and removed in an environmentally sensitive manner. “If you like wood with a story, then it doesn’t get any better than this material,” writes Mark Dalton. “This is material from the bottom of Belizean rivers. Belize used to be a British colony. The British exported a lot of mahogany from Belize throughout history and during the 19th century they used the rivers of Belize as their main source of transportation. Occasionally the denser mahogany logs would sink! These logs for over 100 years had been lost and forgotten, until now.





All the logs were salvaged using environmentally sound practices using small boats and pulleys to remove these logs off the bottom of the rivers. The logs were cut in Belize using local labor. Hence this is a very eco-friendly product. The material was kiln-dried in Belize, but has been re-stickered to give the piles air flow to allow them to air dry even more. Due to the age of these logs, all this material would have been old-growth timber. The color is excellent and the grain is tight. Some of the material is even figured. Plus the material has a very interesting natural edge. The texture has been sculpted by the river and is very pleasing to the eye."

Slabs of tonewood from an ancient mahogany trunk known iconically as The Tree are among the most coveted tonewoods—even Slash of Guns N' Roses had a custom acoustic built from The Tree (read about it in the March 2016 issue of AG). But that's not even the most impressive salvaged tonewood: Earlier this year, Santa Cruz Guitars exhibited at the Winter NAMM Show a one-of-a-kind H13 model fashioned from a set of 8,000-year-old oak boards cut from a trunk

found in a Czech sandpit and a fallen 3,000-year-old Sitka spruce tree salvaged from the melting Arctic permafrost. A unique guitar built of woods from the dawn of civilization (featured in the June 2016 issue of AG).

#### GUITARS DON'T LIVE BY TONEWOOD ALONE

More than just the species of wood will have a big influence on how a guitar sounds. The way it's cut, for instance, will affect both its workability for a guitar maker and its sonic performance. Quarter-sawn lumber—in which the wood is sawed at a radial angle into four quarters—is optimal for tops, as it lends stiffness. "A quarter-sawn top is stiffer [than a plain-sawn one]," Chris Herrod, sales manager at Luthiers Mercantile International, explains. "Great stiffness gives the wood greater resonance, all other things being equal, and allows the luthier greater leeway to alter the tone and response of the top by changing the thickness."

It's also important to remember that a guitar's design has more influence on its sound

than the tonewoods used to build it. Though rosewood, for instance, generally has a stronger bass response than mahogany, a mahogany dreadnought can easily have a more impressive bottom end than, say, a rosewood parlor guitar. A couple of other variables that impact a guitar's sound are its setup—an instrument with overly low action tends to have an anemic tone even if it's made from the most optimally resonant tonewoods—and even its scale length. "A long scale length will normally accentuate the trebles, for example," Herrod says.

Keep in mind, too, that the sonic performance of a particular tonewood depends not only on the wood, but also the build of the instrument. A finely made plywood guitar, for instance, will likely sound superior and be more resonant than a poorly built rosewood guitar—just as the finest guitar made from premium Adirondack spruce and Brazilian rosewood will only sound as good as the guitarist playing it.

AG editor Greg Cahill and Dana Bourgeois contributed to this article.

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GOOD





# WOOD



**ONE GUITAR MAKER IS ON A MISSION  
TO END CLEAR-CUTTING IN AMERICA'S  
LARGEST NATIONAL FOREST** BY PATRICK SULLIVAN



**T**hey are some of the oldest living things on the planet—towering old-growth Sitka spruce trees that first sprouted from the damp, mossy earth of Alaska's Tongass National Forest about the time Columbus encountered America. But these ancient trees, which can grow 300 feet tall over some 500 years, are as vulnerable as they are venerable. A chainsaw can bring a short, sharp end to their long centuries of growth.

The Tongass is one of a few national forests in America where clear-cutting is still allowed. And industrial logging has taken a heavy toll: Some researchers estimate that more than half the original old-growth forests in the Tongass have been lost.

Toppled trees typically end up as paper or two-by-fours. But old-growth Sitka spruce is highly prized as tonewood for acoustic guitars. It's strong and light, with regular, knot-free rings that make it an excellent sound conductor. That weighs heavily on the mind of Tom Bedell, who has visited the Tongass a dozen times. After each trip, the Oregon-based founder of Bedell Guitars has come away awed by nature's beauty—and dismayed by the

federal government's decision to allow clear-cutting in America's largest national forest.

In May, Bedell launched a new organization called Musicians for Forests. The goal: To build a coalition of manufacturers, musicians, retailers, and others to fight for a ban on clear-cutting of old-growth Sitka in the Tongass. "The idea is that by the end of 2016, we as an industry will no longer cause any more trees to be clear-cut for wood," he says. "Next to the redwood forests in California, the Tongass grows the oldest trees in North America. We're asking countries around the world to stop destroying their forests. Meanwhile, in our backyard, we're taking one of our greatest treasures and allowing clear-cutting.

"It's crazy."

Yet, instrument makers aren't the biggest culprits threatening the Tongass, Bedell says. There are other buyers for this wood, including furniture makers and the building trades, and the clear-cuts are green-lighted and subsidized by the U.S. Forest Service at the behest of Alaska politicians. According to agency records, roughly 19 percent of the sawn Sitka spruce goes to stringed instruments—like

guitars. Another 36 percent goes into piano sound boards. The remaining percentage is manufactured into other products by local mill operators who purchase timber sales from the Tongass National Forest. But Bedell believes the acoustic-guitar community has a special responsibility—and a special power—to fight the problem. "We can be a bigger voice because we are music," he says.

**U**nder Bedell's plan, guitar-makers would agree to no longer buy clear-cut Sitka. Companies with clear-cut Sitka in stock would grandfather the wood into production planning—and then move to sustainable sources, like Lutz spruce.

Bedell's group may be the first effort to formally organize guitar makers and musicians in defense of the Tongass. Alli Harvey, an Alaska-based Sierra Club representative campaigning against clear-cutting in the Tongass, is not aware of any previous effort to get guitar manufacturers involved in the issue.


However, a handful of years ago, the CEOs of the three major acoustic guitar companies—Martin & Co.'s Chris Martin, Taylor Guitars'



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**Clear-cutting destroys the crowded, competitive forest environment that leads to the slow growth that makes good wood.**

Bob Taylor, and Gibson Guitars' Dave Berryman—traveled together to the area with Greenpeace's Musicwood Coalition. Their mission was to try and persuade Sealaska, the largest non-federal landholder in southeast Alaska, to slow down its clear-cutting in the Tongass. The trip was documented in the film *Musicwood*, which also included appearances by several players including Steve Earle and Kaki King.

"We met the folks from Sealaska, who own these lands, and we became friends, even if we did not agree at every point," Taylor told *Acoustic Guitar* in a 2014 story about the documentary. "If we cut it all now," he added, "we will never see these old trees again."

Harvey supports the idea of guitar companies becoming more involved. "I would hope that instrument makers do their homework



Tom Bedell, left, with Brent Cole Sr. from Alaska Specialty Woods

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Tom Bedell and Brent Cole Sr.  
in the Tongass National Forest

and purchase wood harvested from sustainable resources, not old-growth forest,” she says.

Bedell’s Musicians for Forests launched in May with a website and an online petition, but the organization hasn’t yet found the strong support Bedell expected.

Dave Matthews has signed on. So have Zach Gill, Adam Gardner, and other musicians. Several smaller manufacturers have joined. In addition to Bedell, those include Breedlove, Weber, Santa Cruz Guitar Co. and Boulder Creek Guitars. Patagonia and Howler Bros. are among the outdoor manufacturers that have signed on. But the bigger guitar companies haven’t yet jumped in. “We’re kind of at the beginning of a movement, and I’ve got a lot of work to do to get everybody on board,” Bedell says.

If the ecological imperative isn’t enough, Bedell is counting on enlightened self-interest to sway musicians and guitar makers. Clear-cutting in the Tongass poses an existential threat to old-growth Sitka. By some estimates, old-growth forests in the area could be virtually eliminated within decades. Replanting won’t help. Long, slow growth is what makes old trees so good for tonewood. While replanted Sitka grows quickly, young wood has too much cellulose fiber to make good instruments.

Clear-cutting destroys the crowded, competitive forest environment that leads to the slow growth that makes good wood. And industrial logging also wreaks havoc on wildlife like wolves, bears and salmon, as well as nearby streams and rivers. “My view is that a tree is like one of our kids who grows up in a neighborhood,” Bedell says. “That neighborhood, the kids nearby, they all help make that kid who they are. So cutting that tree by destroying the neighborhood it grew up in, it destroys the soul of the music.”

But when it comes to sustainable alternatives to clear-cutting, some musicians and guitar makers wonder about feasibility.

Does salvaged wood sound as good as wood cut from a living tree? Bedell says what really matters is how the wood is cut. “I don’t think there’s a difference between a salvaged tree and a living tree,” he says. “I do think there are differences within every tree and how you process it.”

**M**any companies cut Sitka tops to a given dimension. But the bottom of the tree is supporting an incredible amount of weight. “There is no way the density and frequency of the wood at the bottom is the same as the wood at the top,” Bedell says. “So if you cut your tops to a standard dimension, you’re going to get a lot of variability.”

**Bedell believes the guitar community has a special responsibility—and a special power—to fight the problem of clear-cutting.**

A more challenging question is whether there is enough salvaged wood for instrument makers. “There might not be,” Bedell says. “It may be that selective harvest would be part of this process. You go in and carefully cut an old-growth tree that’s near the end of its life, without damaging the forest around it. I think that’s very appropriate.”

That would raise the cost. “You may pay two dollars more a soundboard to do it that way,” he says. “But to me that’s a very small price to pay to save our Tongass Forest.”

Bedell’s own company uses wood that’s not harvested through clear-cutting or other unsustainable methods. He’s counting on that practice to spread. “Instead of waiting for the government to act, we need to do the right thing,” Bedell says. “As an industry, we could then speak in a unified way that we are no longer contributing to the degradation of the Tongass.” **AG**

*Learn more about Musicians for Forests at [clearcutfreemusic.com](http://clearcutfreemusic.com).*



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# MAGIC MOUNTAIN

Raised in the shadows of the Himalayas, guitarist Tashi Dorji's avant-jazz knows no boundaries

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

**T**ashi Dorji paced nervously up and down a block in Thimphu, the capital of his native country, Bhutan. The guitarist was slated to perform on a national TV program, accompanying his cousin, the traditional folk singer Lhamu Drukpa, and to give a solo performance and talk about his music. "I don't have the vocabulary in my native language to explain it," he says, during a phone interview.

Dorji's music isn't easy to describe in English either. It's tempting to draw a

comparison with Derek Bailey, the late improviser known for his challenging style that made use of extended techniques. But that would be a superficial analysis, as Dorji only borrows these techniques in creating idiosyncratic, instrumental soundscapes, which can be witnessed on his split album with Portland, Oregon-based guitarist Marisa Anderson. The album, titled simply *Tashi Dorji/Marisa Anderson*, is due in November, on Footfalls Records.

Growing up in the ancient Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan without television or

Internet, Dorji, 37, had scant exposure to another world of music. Outside of the country's traditional folk songs, he heard only a limited selection of Western music on short-wave radio. He picked up an old, barely playable nylon-string guitar when he was in ninth grade and around the same time began scaring up the random bootleg cassettes he found in grocery stores—recordings of groups like Nirvana. "Early on, pretty much everything I learned on the guitar was by ear," Dorji says. "I had no choice but to pick out



the chords on my bootleg of Nirvana's *MTV Unplugged in New York* album."

When, in 2000, Dorji moved to Asheville, North Carolina, to attend Warren Wilson College, he relished unrestricted access to music of all types, from punk to free jazz. At the expense of his studies, he spent countless hours checking out the complete works of any artist who captured his interest. A pivotal moment came when he found a copy of jazz guitarist Bailey's *Standards* at a used record shop. "It was such an epiphany," Dorji says. "Hearing music that broke so completely with tradition really freed me to play the guitar in a way that's without dogma."

Soon, Dorji dropped out of school to pursue music full-time. His unfettered approach to the guitar can be heard on a long string of recordings, several self-released and recorded at home on a Zoom handheld flash recorder. But the album with Marisa Anderson was produced in a more polished way. The sound engineer and accordionist Patrick Kukucka recorded the guitarists in Marshall, North Carolina, at the Mission for Temporal Art—an old church converted into a performance space.

"[The venue owners] let us come in for an evening to record. It was perfect, because I'd long been interested in recording in a space with a beautiful natural reverb, and it was a very inspiring space to play in," Dorji says.

**A**s it is on all of his recordings, the music Dorji made in the church didn't involve preplanning. All aspects, including the nonstandard tunings, were negotiated in the moment. He then edited the two hours of his performance to the three tracks on the album, clocking in at around 17 minutes. "I don't really have a set process," he says. "Everything I do is completely improvised. But when I listened back to the [raw] recording, I heard interesting events and motifs that I elaborated on, giving them a compositional feel."

Given the sophistication of his playing and its tonal and dynamic nuances, Dorji's choice of guitars is surprising. He coaxes stunning sounds from the cheapest guitars: a Hohner HW605 steel-string, an example of which recently sold online for \$51, and in the same class, an Ibanez 2839 nylon-string. "I guess I'm not much of a gearhead," he says, laughing.

I checked in with Dorji via email after his TV appearance. He had nothing to worry about; he ended up only playing and not talking about his music. "It was better that way," he wrote. "Kind of leaving the music open to whatever interpretation people can find, especially people who have never heard anything like it before." **AC**

**'Hearing music that broke so completely with tradition really freed me to play the guitar in a way that's without dogma.'**

**TASHI DORJI**



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# ACoustic DUOS



## Three guitar duos reflect on what makes their partnerships work

BY EDDIE HUFFMAN

**L**ennon and McCartney. Doc and Merle. Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell. Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Laurel and Hardy. Billy Wilder and Charles Brackett. Tina Fey and Amy Poehler. Gene Wilder and Richard Pryor. Penn and Teller. The Coen Brothers. Mick and Keith. Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs.

The best collaborative partnerships draw from the strengths of each contributor to create something neither could conjure up independently, whether in music, dance, film, or any other art form. Collaborators operating at peak form achieve something like a separate consciousness, an intuition that allows them to communicate without words, to anticipate each other's moves as fast as their synapses can fire.

Some of the best pairings may come from collaborators who appear ill-matched on the surface, who hail from different traditions or manifest seemingly incongruous sensibilities. A fully connected duo may fill in the gaps in each other's experience or technique, or merge discordant styles to create a compelling new blend. Alternately, two people drawing from similar backgrounds and traditions may inspire each other to heights neither would reach individually.

AG asked three contemporary acoustic-guitar duos—Rodrigo y Gabriela, Eric Skye and Mark Goldenberg, and Julian Lage and Chris Eldridge—to reflect on what makes their partnerships work, and how they combine their skills to create remarkable music.





**GABRIELA QUINTERO  
AND RODRIGO SANCHEZ**

**A**fter playing with Gabriela Quintero for more than half his life, Rodrigo Sanchez knows exactly what kind of tune to present to his musical partner. Years of collaboration have created a shared musical mind for the duo. “I know the kind of thing that Gabriela is going to like and that suits the project,” Sanchez says. “I write a lot of stuff that is not for Rod and Gab, but I’m very clear on what’s for Rod and Gab.”

Each member of the duo has distinct roles in the **Rodrigo y Gabriela** sound, which combines metal and nuevo flamenco with other Latin influences, played on nylon-string Yamaha NX series guitars. Sanchez handles the melody and leads; Quintero’s hard-driving playing style makes her a one-woman rhythm section. “Because we have such a different technique, we don’t compete with each other,” Sanchez says. “That gives space to the music to grow in a personal way.”

They also have complementary macro and micro perspectives on songs, according to Quintero. “I can picture the piece flowing freely, keep it alive and not get stuck on one little bit,” she says. “We both cover important things in the music, so we make a good team like that. If Rod decided he wanted thirds in the melody, some third notes or fifths, he can stay there and make sure everything is perfect. For me, it’s like, ‘Yes, but we should keep the leads like this, and maybe get rid of all these rounds.’”

**‘People enjoy the acoustic sounds of the guitar, so I don’t see why we would ever want to put an album out with drums and bass and all of that!’**

**GABRIELA QUINTERO**

That kind of creative friction can play an important role in collaborations. They often record different versions of the same song based on each person’s individual preferences, and decide which to use after living with each for a few days.

On a broader scale, Rodrigo y Gabriela wrestle with whether to stay true to their stripped down, acoustic-duo roots or expand their musical palette. Sanchez has experienced frustration in the studio trying to vary the sound of two guitars.

“Using the EQ, we’ve tried to change the range of sound, but it’s almost impossible,” he says.

His solution? Bring in more instruments, as the duo did when they collaborated with a 13-piece Cuban orchestra for the 2012 album *Area 52*. But where Sanchez pushes to expand Rodrigo y Gabriela’s albums beyond the established format, Quintero strives to remain true

to the duo’s simple, beloved sound. “I always try to come back to what we do, because that’s what people like: the two guitars,” she says. “People enjoy the acoustic sounds of the guitar, so I don’t see why we would ever want to put an album out with drums and bass and all of that. At the end of the day, we are going to go on tour with just me and Rodrigo on the stage. Sometimes the challenging part is to make a full sound out of the two instruments, deliver a good blend.”

Sanchez acknowledges the need for the pair to have a recognizable audio signature: “Whatever is going to be guiding the music, there should be the sound of Rod and Gab.”

Rodrigo y Gabriela perfected their blend with years of daily practice, including rehearsals before and after gigs and radio performances.

“If you keep watering a plant, it changes,” Quintero says. “After one month, that plant will be very different. Music is the same: If you are a mindful player, even if you are playing the same tune that you have been playing for years, if you keep mindful with your notes, and meaning every note, that’s where you water your musicality. That’s how we discovered new skills so we could give life to new ideas.”

**Essential Listening: 9 Dead Alive**  
(Rubyworks)





JOEY LUSTERMAN

MARK GOLDENBERG, LEFT,  
AND ERIC SKYE

**T**ransitioning from jazz and pop standards to original tunes helped Eric Skye and Mark Goldenberg blend their fingerstyle playing into something unique to the duo. “It became a little bit more ‘intertangled,’” Skye says. “Getting away from the paradigm of ‘I’m comping and Mark’s soloing.’ We’re really two solo guitarists playing together.”

“It’s kind of like dinnertime at my house,” adds Goldenberg. “Everyone’s talking at the same time!”

Goldenberg, a Los Angeles resident and long-time session player with Jackson Browne, had never performed as part of a duo before teaming up with Skye, who lives in Portland, Oregon. The pair met in 2008 at the Healdsburg Guitar Festival, where they were booked separately to perform. Goldenberg says he appreciates their similarities and differences. “Eric is a really, really good single-line player,” Goldenberg says. “He plays single lines exceptionally well and has a lot of, can I say, ‘verve’...?”

Skye: “Please do!”

“... in his playing, which is great. I don’t really have that. I’m more of a chord guy, in a way. So I think we complement each other in that way, although I’m not completely a chord guy. We’re not polar in any way.”

From Skye’s perspective, the men have distinctive strengths but similar range.

“Mark’s language is just incredibly complex,” Skye says. “He’s the Obi-Wan Kenobi

**‘Mark’s language is just incredibly complex. He’s the Obi-Wan Kenobi of harmony!’ ERIC SKYE**

of harmony. Maybe I lean a little bit toward blues, so maybe that’s something that I’m bringing to the party. But, by the same token, Mark is a badass blues player, and I know a little about harmony, too.”

Skye plays the 00-Skye 015—a signature model from the Santa Cruz Guitar Co. that he designed with Santa Cruz founder Richard Hoover. Goldenberg plays a Collings 001Mh and a Kenny Hill Performance Series classical guitar. They don’t really rehearse or talk much about what they play, instead letting their guitars speak for themselves.

The bond was formed the first time they played a song together, Skye says.

“You can tell when someone’s really listening, making that connection,” Skye says. “That was pretty instantaneous.”

“Discussion has never been our strong suit,” Goldenberg adds. “It was never something that we actually talked about.”

They start with a simple outline of a song.

“Mark would record himself on his phone, playing the head, so I could hear the tune, then jotted down the chord changes,” Skye

says. “And then I did basically the same thing. So we basically have the structure and then we have the head. Usually whoever wrote the tune is probably gonna play the head and the back end. Our act is about this whole listening thing; it’s a conversation. And so the more planning, the more you’ve kind of taken away from that.”

Goldenberg likens it to an “action painting.”

“It’s kind of like a Jackson Pollock painting, watching it happen,” Goldenberg says. “We feed off each other. Having a musical conversation like this, for me, it’s a unique situation. In other jazz collaborations I’ve had, it’s always been ‘step out and take your solo.’ You play the head, you take a solo, the next guy takes a solo, then you play the head again. We’re much more compositional in our approach to playing. So even though there are times when each of us steps forward, it’s not a traditional thing. I haven’t had that experience before, so I’m really enjoying it.”

Ending songs can be tricky in an improvisational context.

“You need an exit strategy,” Skye says.

“When you work out an ending to a tune and you pull it off, two or three people in the audience really like it,” Goldenberg jokes. “There’s a guy in the back going, ‘Finally, they ended together!’”

**Essential Listening: Artifact**  
(Goldenberg)





**JULIAN LAGE, LEFT, AND  
CHRIS ELDRIDGE**

**J**ulian Lage and Chris “Crittter” Eldridge take conscious steps to balance composition with improvisation, structure with fluid interaction, in their folk-based music. Eldridge sees writing new tunes as carefully constructing a path to spontaneous interplay. “A lot of our music lives in the land of improvisation,” he says. “The original catalyst—the thing that got us together and got us so excited back in 2008—is still maybe the core of what we do.”

“Absolutely,” Lage adds. “Composition is only so that when we play a show or make a record, we can just play and enjoy it. It’s not a math problem.”

“That’s all to enable you to get back to that warm, human, delightful place,” Eldridge says.

Both men see songwriting as a key to their musical partnership. They generally write separately, then bring a song to the other to flesh it out as a duo. “A lot of it is taking cues from the actual material and doing our best to just not mess it up,” Lage says.

The duo tried a new challenge recently when they got together to write for a few days—write quickly and don’t overthink the material. They each agreed to write a song in 15 minutes, then come together to play them. “We’d take inspiration from something that we loved,” Eldridge says. “If the song was called ‘Plywood Floor,’ we’d take the image of a plywood floor and run with it. Or it could be the chord structure and the way that it gets resolved.”

When playing with Eldridge, Lage usually

**‘One of the things that’s so incredible about playing with [Chris] is that you’re constantly surprised by the other person.’ JULIAN LAGE**

plays a 1939 Martin 000-18. Eldridge plays one of two Martin dreadnoughts: a D-18 or a D-28.

At 29, Lage—a child prodigy who was the subject of the Oscar-nominated 1996 short documentary *Jules at Eight*—has played in duo settings with musicians from wildly different backgrounds: mandolinist David Grisman to avant-garde guitarist Nels Cline. He’s also performed as part of vibes player Gary Burton’s jazz quintet, and sat in with a range of experimental rock artists, including Yoko Ono’s revived Plastic Ono Band. With so much musical mojo in his background, Lage hesitates to examine his chemistry with Eldridge too closely.

“One of the things that’s so incredible about playing with Crittter—and I think this is true of any great relationship or musical collaboration—is that you’re constantly surprised by the other person,” Lage says. “‘OK, I think I understand where they’re coming from,’ or ‘I know they’ve done X, Y, and Z in their career, so they’re probably going to come this way.’ And then, all of a sudden, your partner comes

to you with a totally different perspective that you wouldn’t have expected.”

Each acknowledges the other’s influence on his playing together after eight years, but both see that influence as too pervasive to pinpoint. Lage still approaches the partnership from a jazz perspective and Eldridge—the son of Seldom Scene banjo player Ben Eldridge—from bluegrass, but the genre distinctions count for little when they start talking about what they’ve learned from each other.

“Crittter’s inspired me in so many ways as a player, as a conceptualist, as someone who puts together songs, shows, set lists, presentations,” Lage says. “There’s not a single part of my constitution that hasn’t been affected positively by seeing Chris as a guitarist, a professional musician, and as a student, too. I know I’m better for it, and there’s this feeling of wanting to be worthwhile—I want to show up with my best self because of my admiration.”

Adds Eldridge: “He sets such a good example of what it is to be a musician. His relationship with music is so beautiful and open. And his relationship to being a guitarist, it’s so elegant in a way like a great dancer would be, where he looks at it from all these different angles, cultivates the spiritual side, the technical side, the physical side, the emotional side.” **AG**

**Essential Listening: Avalon**  
(Modern Lore Records)





Billy Bragg, left,  
and Joe Henry





# MAKING TRACKS

*Billy Bragg and Joe Henry turn a rail trip into a record of forgotten America*

BY KENNY BERKOWITZ

In their 25-year friendship, British folksinger Billy Bragg and his American cohort Joe Henry have performed only a handful of gigs together and recorded just one duet, “Dark as a Dungeon,” which appeared on Henry’s 1994 EP *Fireman’s Wedding*. But on *Shine a Light: Field Recordings from the Great American Railroad* (Cooking Vinyl), the two sound as if they’ve been riding the rails together for decades. Indeed, Bragg and Henry recorded the album in rail stations along the Texas Eagle line, from Chicago to Los Angeles, tracking 13 songs in four days and over 2,700 miles.

The album picks up where Bragg’s Joe

Henry-produced 2013 release *Tooth & Nail* left off, following in the dusty footsteps of that record’s cover of Woody Guthrie’s “I Ain’t Got No Home.” The standards on *Shine a Light*—including “Hobo’s Lullaby,” “Midnight Special,” “Railroad Bill,” “Rock Island Line” (learn to play on p. 65), and “Waiting for a Train”—are as old as the stations where Bragg and Henry found a few not-so-quiet corners, cut two or three takes, and then boarded another train to another destination. But there’s something new about the album, too, as it finds an enduring harmony in the folk simplicity of two friends, two Gibsons, and one dream of rediscovering the old, weird America.

PHOTOS BY JACOB BLICKENSTAFF





#### Who came up with the idea for the album?

**BRAGG** I'd been thinking about it for awhile. I've always been interested in the beginnings of guitar music in my country in the mid-1950s, when Lonnie Donegan became the first British artist ever to get onto the charts playing guitar—and his first hit was Lead Belly's "Rock Island Line." So I've always had a place in my heart for railroad songs, and a few years ago, I was invited to take part in a project to celebrate the American/Swiss photographer Robert Frank. [The photography magazine] *Aperture* suggested I travel with an

American photographer, Alec Soth, who asked me, "Is there anywhere in America you've always wanted to go?" And I suddenly thought to myself, "Rock Island—where the Rock Island Line comes from."

So Alec and I got in a van, started down the Mississippi Valley, crossed over into Arkansas, and followed where the Rock Island Line used to go. The actual song is written about the line between Memphis and Little Rock, which doesn't exist anymore, but the old Rock Island Line station is still one of the stops on the Texas Eagle. We stood there

for 20 or 30 minutes, singing songs while people got on the train for Chicago, and from that experience, I conceived the idea of making an album about trains, riding the Texas Eagle from Chicago to Los Angeles.

#### Joe, what did you think when Billy approached you with the idea?

**HENRY** Bill has been a friend of mine for more than 20 years, and I admire him as an artist as much as I love him as a human being. So when he said, "I've got a proposal," my immediate response was, "Yes," then, "Tell





me what it is.” I’m always going to be interested in what Bill is thinking, and I quickly understood this was not a nostalgic project about how much we love the idea of trains. It was going to be about recognizing something that has become invisible.

**If it's not just a nostalgic project about your love of trains, then what are you trying to get at?**

**BRAGG** Before the railroads came, you could only build a city on the coast or on a river. The railroad allowed people to think beyond

the horizon, and you still get that feeling in the songs. It was the internet of the old, weird America, connecting people beyond their wildest dreams. To travel faster than a horse and to do it all day and all night. The railroad made America, and that’s what we were trying to tap into—not the America I’m familiar with, but the places that were important 100 years ago. The Texas Eagle cuts right through the heart of it, so you see the enormity of what it took to build the rails and the priorities of people who are long gone. It’s like you’re following a dry river bed.

**‘We came looking for Robert Johnson, and instead we found the spirit of Jimmie Rodgers!’**

**BILLY BRAGG**

**What do you love about these songs?**

**HENRY** They’re a part of our cultural architecture, and a lot of them are just beautiful pieces of writing. I’m a person who really loves mid- and slow-tempo minor-key ballads, so “The





## THE GHOST OF JIMMIE RODGERS

Stopping in San Antonio, Texas, Billy Bragg and Joe Henry spent a night in the Gunter Hotel, the site of Robert Johnson's 1936 recording session for the American Record Corporation.

"Strangely enough, I got the room where Johnson recorded 'Sweet Home Chicago,'" Bragg says. "Number 414. It's actually a corner suite, and my understanding is Johnson recorded in the office while the engineer used the bedroom as the control room. We didn't get into the hotel till 2 a.m., so everybody was totally knackered, and it was too late for me to do anything but lay in bed and wait to see if anyone turned up in the middle of the night, offering to teach me to play the blues in exchange for my soul."

"The next morning, we had a chat over breakfast, and I said, 'Let's do a song in the room.' So we got the sound recordist, and just before we checked out, we recorded the song that was next in our plan, Jimmie Rodgers' 'Waiting for a Train.' It was only subsequently we discovered Jimmie Rodgers lived at the Gunter in the late '20s and early '30s. We came looking for Robert Johnson, and instead we found the spirit of Jimmie Rodgers."



L&N Don't Stop Here Anymore" and "In the Pines" are really attractive, seductive to me, with a meaning that goes beyond the words that travel along the top of its wave.

**What made you choose "Gentle on My Mind?"**

**HENRY** That was a song I bought as a 45, brand new, when I was eight years old, and loved it ever since. It was a song we hadn't expected to play on this trip, but the very first night, we were sitting up in an empty sleeper car, and something Bill played reminded me of the descending line. So I started playing it, just for the brotherhood of putting it up into the air. And when I realized it related thematically to what we were doing, I was doubly delighted it had offered itself up, out of the atmosphere.

**Would you say that each of the songs has some resonance with you?**

**BRAGG** Well, that's the air of discovery. "Gentle on My Mind" got a lot of plays in our house when I was growing up, so I've known it for a long time. "Early Morning Rain" is one of the earliest songs I learned to play as a busker in my teens. When I was in the Scouts, "Midnight Special" was one of the songs we used to sing

**'I quickly understood this was not a nostalgic project about how much we love the idea of trains. It was going to be about recognizing something that has become invisible!'**

**JOE HENRY**

around the campfire, because everybody knew "Midnight Special," everybody could join in.

**What makes these versions feel like Bill and Joe?**

**BRAGG** It's a matter of sitting down and bringing our perspectives to these songs. The version of "Rock Island Line" is not very similar to the Lonnie Donegan version that began the skiffle boom—it's closer to the original recorded at Cummins State Prison by John Lomax and Lead Belly. We took it back to that call-and-response version, throwing it back and forth to one another. Some of these songs are very familiar to people, and in some way, we're just trying to make them our own.



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**'I brought a mid-'30s Gibson L-00 with a neck that feels like a baseball bat. It's the same year and model as the guitar Woody Guthrie is most often photographed playing.'** JOE HENRY

**After all these years, what was it like to finally do a full album together?**

**HENRY** It felt inevitable. The idea was always there, waiting for the moment that would allow it, and when it finally came, it felt incredibly natural.

**How did you decide which guitar to bring?**

**BRAGG** I have a workhorse guitar, a Gibson J-45 that I've had for about three years. I know it will stay in tune and play in any situation, so I was very confident. Because I'm basically a rhythm player, I'm going to be strumming through these songs, while Joe does the single-note playing.

**HENRY** In the last ten years, I've developed a different voice for myself as a guitar player, away from being the strummer and into a more orchestral approach to playing, which owes a lot to my deep love of American standards. Because Bill is playing in standard tuning and covering the rhythm so well, I could play more single figures to connect the chord changes. I felt this great freedom to play in a way that's different from when I'm playing alone and have to make sure I'm keeping the rhythm alive.

For me, bringing one guitar is trickier than it is for Bill, because I play in open tunings and I play really old guitars, mostly small-bodied Gibsons from the early '30s. They're lightly constructed, which is part of the beauty of their sound, but they don't like to be moved from one tuning to the next—they're not stable that way. So I brought

the one that was the hardest: a mid-'30s Gibson L-00 with a neck that feels like a baseball bat, the one that wouldn't hold us up when we needed to move quickly. It's exactly the same year and model as the guitar Woody Guthrie is most often photographed playing. If I could only take one, I knew that one would be the best.

**Were you thinking about Woody on the trip?**

**HENRY** We're always thinking about Woody. Absolutely. Traveling the stretch between El Paso and Los Angeles, looking out at that arid landscape in the early evening, we were talking about Woody and thinking about what it meant to find a way across that daunting landscape, knowing there was something better on the other side if you could just survive the trip. He was very much in our thoughts, and from one song to the next, we talked about which one of us would be Woody and which one would be Cisco Houston.

**What part of this album sounds like Cisco?**

**HENRY** Just the idea of two distinctly different musicians coming together. Cisco had a real elegance, a formal approach, versus Woody's rusty-blade approach to writing, playing, and performing. And yet, we both believe Cisco was Woody's most natural, most productive singing partner. Their differences were so great that there was never any stepping on the beat, because they were occupying different roles. By the same token, even though Bill and I are influenced by a lot of the same people, our styles are so different that there's a natural place to come together without ever finding ourselves doing the same job.

**What surprised you most about this trip?**

**BRAGG** How little fuss we produced by putting down two microphones and singing a song. Do you know Union Station in Los Angeles? It has a couple of open courtyards, and we found this covered walkway—like a subway tunnel, really—open at either end to the courtyards. There was a corner where nobody could see us, but at the same time, we could hear the birds. So when you listen to "Early Morning Rain," you can hear the birds singing. I think we may have woken them up. It was ten past five [a.m.] when we finished "Early Morning Rain"—the end of the line, just a short way from Joe's house, and we felt we nailed it.

**HENRY** I'm surprised how emotional I found it. To be traveling together, to be sitting up late at night on a train, sharing bunks in this tight little compartment. There was something about engaging in that music, joining a tradition that's been here long before us, and seeing our brotherhood, our humanity in relation to others. That's emotional. That was a big part of our process, and that's what I hear now.

AC



## WHAT JOE HENRY PLAYS

Over the past decade, Henry has been experimenting with different kinds of strings. "I was dedicated to very dead strings," says Henry, who uses Martin Retro nickel-alloy strings on his favorite, lightest Gibson L-00s. "I used to only change strings when I broke one. But when my playing changed, thanks to open tunings, I started looking for more orchestral clarity. I had been shortchanging what it meant to try different strings, so I've spent a lot of time experimenting with different gauges to find that balance I need: heavier strings for a little more tension or lighter strings to allow the space to vibrate more. I used to think that light strings meant wimpier sound and heavier strings meant bolder sound.

"That was completely foolish," he adds. "My friend Mark Stutman at Folkway Music was the one who got me turned around, saying, 'Don't think of lighter strings as being lighter sound. Think of them as strings that allow the body of your guitar to speak with more overtone, to move more, to resonate more. Not to tighten it up, clench it down, and make it colder, which can happen when you put heavy strings on a light guitar.'"

"I can't quite put into words what these nickel strings are doing with my Nick Lucas Special, but there's something beautiful going on that's really turning my head."





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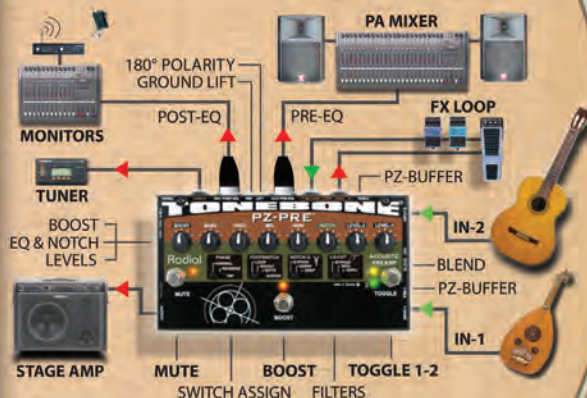
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## On the road: A conversation with Ben Harper

BY CHRISTOPHER  
PAUL STELLING

# TALKING

*Editor's note: In April, the singer, songwriter, and stellar acoustic guitarist Christopher Paul Stelling toured as the opening act for Ben Harper and his reunited Innocent Criminals. AG asked Stelling to sit down and chat with Harper about songwriting, guitars, growing up in a famous music store, and his recent trio of very different projects: Call It What It Is, his new release with the Innocent Criminals; Childhood Home, his acoustic-folk duet album with his mom Ellen Harper; and Get Up!, his blues-rock collaboration with harmonica legend Charles Musselwhite. The two conversed not as journalist and subject, but as fellow musicians.*

**Y**ou're known for traversing multiple genres, but you do it so effortlessly and you're always Ben Harper, whether it's a folk song or a reggae song or a rock song. That's been really inspiring for me to see while touring with you this month. What's the common thread that ties all of these genres together for you?

The common thread is they can all be stripped back bare to me and a guitar, and they stand up. That's the test for anything—if you can strip it

**'My grandmother taught autoharp and dulcimer and banjo and guitar. The first voices I heard were folk-based.'** BEN HARPER

bare and it's still the song, then you can take it any direction you want.

I heard Chris Cornell, the singer from Soundgarden, do "Billy Jean"—Michael Jackson's "Billy Jean"—solo acoustic, and it'll stop you in your tracks. At that point, I guess, the through-line is: It's folk and blues, you know what I mean? It's all folk.

One of the things that I love is when you look into old Hank Williams stuff, or Skip James or Bill Monroe, even though they're later considered the fathers of their individual genres—country, blues, bluegrass—they all refer to themselves as folk musicians, and the root of folk music is just people with acoustic instruments.

That makes sense to me. If we strip it back and it has a life, that's the through-line. As a songwriter, I like when people talk about the process. I'm not going to ask you the typical, "What comes first—the music or the lyrics?" because we know the answer to that: It's whatever comes first. But do you have any rituals when you sit down to write? Do you create any sort of environment for yourself? I've never really insisted on setting a mood, nor have I pursued any mood to be set. I spent the first 12-plus years doing a couple hundred shows a year, so back [in earlier days] I never had, nor could I afford, the luxury of providing this ideal environment.

If a good song taps you on the shoulder, you run with it and, hopefully, if you cross the finish line, lucky you! If not, you got something in the bank to work on.

I mean, I've been to places where I went, "God, this is so beautiful!" But sometimes experiences are beyond even songs. To write a song would take away from being present in that moment. Never mind taking a picture! So, I'll just



# GSSHOP

TERRY SHEAR

let that be a moment and then carry that away and bring it into a song [later] if I can.

I think a lot of songwriters go through this situation in the beginning where you come up with maybe an idea for a verse and an idea for a chorus, and then stagnate on that. But lately, when I find that first verse and I find that chorus, I'll sit down and commit to getting all the verses—getting more material than I need, because it's easier to take away from than to add to later when you've lost that flame.

That resonates deeply with me. No matter what I have to get to, [finishing a song] ends up, for the most part, taking precedence—sitting with it while there's that sort of rush of blood to the heart.

**For me, sometimes it can take ten minutes to write a song, and sometimes it can take six months or a year. Is there a song that you have a memory of that came out fully formed?**

*[There's a knock at the door.] Come on in. [The door opens, but no one is there. Stelling and Harper laugh.]*

**That must have been a song at the door, fully formed.**

And it was a soft knock, too. *[Laughs.]* But, um ... yeah, on this record, the title song, "Call It What It Is," came out fully formed, and "After the Storm" came out fully formed. I love it when that happens. When that happens, we're like little schoolkids or something, bouncing around with a new toy.

**To me, "Call It What It Is" is a quintessential, modern-day folk song—almost a murder ballad.**

A hundred percent. *[Editor's note: "Call It What It Is" is an acoustic-blues tune with the opening line, "They shot him in the back, because it's a crime to be black."]*

**And it's about social justice, which has always been a theme of yours.**

Always.

**It hurts, right, seeing all this stuff these days?**

Yeah, it's definitely in a tailspin—politically, socially, culturally. It's quite a place to arrive at after having come so far. Which makes it so fascinating, I think—how ingrained it is in us all.

**So, that song came out really quickly?**

That was in one sitting. Barely took longer to write it than it does to play it. Others were crafted, like "How Dark is Gone" and "Bones." There's a great Tom Waits quote. . . He was crossing a bridge and couldn't find a pen; he was in his car and just said, "All right"—I'm paraphrasing—he said, "All right, God, or Song Gods: If this is good enough, if you want me to remember this, I don't need to write it down."

**Willie Nelson said something similar: "If it's good enough to remember, I'll remember it."**

And I'd love to think like that, but I know how fleeting the muse is. *[Snaps.]* Things can come and go in a nanosecond, and all of a sudden you've . . . Who knows what you've missed? I just don't trust my memory enough to subscribe to that, because no sunset will ever be the same, no two people are the same—and no melody will ever come out in the same way. So, get it down!





ROBERT FORTE

Before you released *Call It What It Is*, you did *Childhood Home*, with your mother, and *Get Up!*, with Charlie Musselwhite. They're drastically different albums, sonically, but they have this certain thing in common on a tangible level. How was it working with your mother, and then, how was it with a longtime hero and friend?

Two of the best musical experiences of my life. I've said that phrase "the best experience of my life," and fine, that's all good and well, and maybe I've had like 20 best musical experiences in my life. But the difference with those two is they were so fresh and so new and so ... not necessarily surprising, but they were signposts that there's still so much to accomplish, there's still so much to look towards, creatively. They were great reminders, that yeah, these are different directions that you can go in singularly and have them exponentially broaden not only your perspective, but your

**'At heart, I'm still just a small-town kid of a music-store owner. I mean, that's what I am, that's my family lineage!'**  
BEN HARPER

outlook. I mean, I don't think I would have ever made a blues record—a record that I was comfortable *calling* the blues.

**Man, I can relate. I've always loved the blues, but I feel like it's a church that you almost have to be initiated into . . .**

Yeah, I'm so glad you said that, because that's where I'm at, too. That makes a lot of sense to me. Like in a way, it chooses you.

My earliest connection to music was folk and blues, and probably in that order, because my grandparents were folk musicians. My grandmother taught autoharp and dulcimer and banjo and guitar. The first voices I heard were folk-based, and they would do "Takes a Worried Man to Sing a Worried Song," "May the Circle Be Unbroken," "Lay Down Your Head, "Tom Dooley"—you know, a lot of union songs and labor-organizer songs, and everything like that, up to "John Henry." But my grandmother would even do Lightnin' Hopkins songs—blues in folk-ese, just strum 'em out, you know? So those are ingrained.

But the first music that just yanked me and said, "Come in"—that summoned me—was the blues: Mississippi John Hurt and Blind Willie Johnson, Blind Willie McTell, Robert Johnson, and then the electric stuff from there. It was just a wide-open field.

**The other night, I overheard you saying, about recording with your mom, "I didn't make a record with her because she's my mother, I made a record with her because she's good."**

Yeah . . . that's the deal. So getting through the Charlie thing and then mom's, these two records signal slight departures and arrivals at the same time. I'd always dreamed of being able to just be in the company of Charlie and make a record like that, so that was a dream come true. Then, to make a folk record that celebrates not only our music store, but our family heritage and my mom and her songwriting chops as well as the material I've written that's just purely folk-based. Just pure artistic appreciation.

**Let's talk about your growing up in a music store. It wasn't just any music store—it was the famed Folk Music Center in Claremont, California, that your grandparents started.** Yeah, a museum even. It's certified.

**Some of the most memorable names in folk music and other styles of music came through there. It obviously had an influence on you. Would you elaborate on some of your most indelible memories from that place?**

As impressive as the names that have come through that door and influenced me, it was also the environment. Growing up in the Folk Music Center, I started the day sweeping the front,



**'There's an entire dialogue that we have with ourselves and with people we don't even know, and that is a very rare place that's beyond words. I think music, if anything, is the bridge to that.'** BEN HARPER

getting all the cigarette butts out, vacuuming the floor, tuning all the instruments, tightening all the drum heads, getting everything set for the day. And there'd be somebody waiting outside.

Once everything was swept up and ready, we'd open the door at 9:30 and a guy would just throw down his 10-speed bike, come in, and ask if he could pull a sitar off the wall. Just some white kid from Claremont College—long hair, short pants, Vans, tank top. He'd pull down a sitar, tune it—and he'd sound like Ravi Shankar! A complete badass. And after an hour of completely transforming the environment, he'd say, "Thank you" and walk out, get on his 10-speed, and you'd never see him again. Or you'd see him again in two years: "Oh, there's the sitar player." And it turned out his parents were government people who had gone to Sri Lanka, Calcutta, New Delhi, and the music had just jumped in him. You learned people's stories after they came back in a few times.

That kind of thing would happen every day on a different instrument. Some guy would come in straight off a plane and say, "Where can I get oud strings?" He'd come in the store, get his oud strings, play that oud, and the next thing you know it's . . . it's like you've heard the best oud playing since like Udi Hrant! The guys would just have the chops of a master and then leave. It was just crazy!

**But I'm sure there were also some serious names, right?**

Yeah, there was like Leonard Cohen, and there was David Lindley, who introduced me to the Weissenborn. I mean, I'd heard the Weissenborn before David, because people would come in and play it and be fascinated with it. But David Lindley was the first cat who devoted his life to that instrument and transformed it into a single-handed orchestra. But the guys you wouldn't know influenced me as much or more than the guys who you'd recognize by name.

**Maybe because they were a little more approachable, or a little less assuming?**

In all fairness, Jackson Browne was the most approachable cat on the planet. He really was. He'd come in and play for hours and talk

to my grandfather about philosophy and poetry and instruments and history. His playing—you'd just sit and listen to him, so beautiful and melodic.

**Your mom said to me the other night at the Beacon, "We called the record *Childhood Home*, and there was a picture of our house on it, but our real house was the music store." Do you feel the same way?**

Yeah, we shared that, she and I. She was brought up in that store and she brought me up in that store, so yeah, we've spent as much waking time in that music store as we have our house.

**That's still one of the first things I do when I roll into a new town: "Hey man, where's the local music store?" I think anyone reading this will identify with that.**

Yeah, and we're among the few that are left. Even through Amazon and eBay, we're survivors. At heart, I'm still just a small-town kid of a music store owner. I mean, that's what I am, that's my family lineage since 1958. My kids are the fifth generation to work in that place.

**Another thing I've also enjoyed while touring with you this month is watching your commitment to your fans. You refer to it as a 20-year conversation. How does it feel to have fans that have been behind you for so long?**

Just straight-up lucky and fortunate. It feels fortunate, it feels lucky, it feels like a blessing and a privilege; a real rare place to have stumbled upwards into.

**So many of your fans, they've grown up with you and gotten married and had their own kids, and now their kids are fans, too. But that's not stopped you from writing and performing new material. They're still on this journey with you, and you with them.**

Yeah, time has proven that to be the case. Because, you know, music . . . How can I put this? There's an entire dialogue that we have with ourselves and with people we don't even know, and that is a very rare place that's beyond words. I think music, if anything, is the bridge to that.

**Music almost makes a time stamp on people's lives. When you hear a song, don't you think back on where you were and what part of your life you were in?**

Absolutely. Like it genetically or spiritually encodes *[itself on]* you. Like memories. Good memories are almost better as memories than they were as experiences. And music lives there. So, to be able to share the music that I've made that has connected over the years—to share a special part of people's lives—I've never, for one second, taken that for granted. **AC**



## WHAT BEN HARPER PLAYS

**CPS: I don't think it would be inaccurate to suggest that you've acquired a couple of guitars in your day. . .**

BH: No, it is *highly* inaccurate to say just a couple. *[Laughs.]*

**Do you have a favorite—like, a desert-island companion guitar?**

At the moment, my desert island companion would have to come with a steel. It would be that [Weissenborn] Solid Neck Style 4. That thing is just—it's imperfect in so many ways, yet it's absolutely the most perfect acoustic lap steel I've ever played!

**And you've played your fair share of them.**

I have.

**When I was doing research on the Weissenborn, you were the first name that came up. Like, you're on the Wikipedia page! You're the guy in the picture with the Weissenborn.**

Holy shit!

**But you've really made a commitment to that guitar and to that style of guitar.**

Yeah, I did, and early. There were a lot of people who were there well before me, but . . . yeah.

**You've also made your own electric designs with Asher.**

Yes, and applying kind of a hollow principle to a solid-top instrument just so I could get more volume.

**Without the feedback, right? To play with the band.**

Exactly. Without the feedback to stay above the band consistently. And I can still get the Wiessenborns above the band on ballads and soul stuff, but not on the rock.



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**Acoustic Classic**  
Must be 'Season  
of the Witch'

PLAY



Swedish fingerstyle guitarist Gabriella Quevedo says ditch your strict practice schedule

HERE'S HOW

# Reignite Your Love for Guitar

6 ways to bust out of your rut

BY PAULINE FRANCE

If you're past the honeymoon phase with your guitar, chances are you've experienced a love-hate relationship with it at some point—and that's OK. Maybe you're frustrated because you can't learn fast enough, or perhaps you're just bored with playing the same old songs. Whatever the case may be, there's still hope.

I talked to seasoned guitarists who successfully reignited the flame with their six-stringed muse after serious bouts of detachment. Below, you'll learn how they did it. Prepare to fall in love again.

## 1 TAKE IT IN FOR AN OIL CHANGE

Think of your guitar like a car. There's no better feeling than driving a squeaky-clean vehicle that runs smoothly and has a sparkling exterior so bright it blinds you. On the other hand, imagine driving a car that reeks, breaks down, and is covered with dirt.

Not too enticing.

John Bronson, guitarist and owner of Bronson Guitar Works in Scottsdale, Arizona, has worked on guitars since 1991 and knows how guitars in top shape affect a player's chops.

"When your guitar is clean and re-strung, it's inspiring because it looks and sounds so much better," Bronson says. "It's like getting a new pair of tennis shoes, or new tires for your car."

Bronson recommends getting your guitar re-strung every three to six months, if you play infrequently. For those who gig regularly, he suggests new strings for every nine hours of playing time.

To get the "works," take your guitar to a repair shop for a setup, which generally includes cleaning, re-stringing, action adjustment and more.

## 2 TAKE SOME TIME OFF

Sometimes you just need a break. Ask San Jose, California, guitarist Marc Schonbrun, who's in the midst of a self-imposed one-year sabbatical from playing. It's a strategy he's used before to great avail. "While it sounds antithetical to take a break like this, it's only taking a break from physically playing," Schonbrun says. "It's not taking a break from music."

The rationale behind his highly disciplined approach is to spend more time listening than

playing. "The physical aspect of playing guitar is too easy to focus on," Schonbrun says. "You have to master techniques and musicality at the same time in order to play great music. It's easy to work on one at the expense of the other, and for whatever reason, physical practice seems to be much easier for me than mental/aural practice is. So I am forcing the issue."

The time Schonbrun normally devotes to playing now goes to ear training and transcribing, which lets him listen with more focus.

If a year is too long, start by taking a few days or weeks off until you find a timeframe that suits you.

## 3 CLEAN YOUR ROOM & BE GOOD TO PEOPLE

What do clean rooms and personal relationships have to do with rekindling passion for guitar? San Diego guitarist and philosophy professor Peter Bolland finds a direct tie between keeping a clean environment, doing good for others, and playing guitar. "I find that my guitar playing goes best when all the other areas of my life are in order," Bolland says. "If



there's chaos and disorder in my environment, in my relationships, or in my finances, I stop and attend to those. When the music isn't happening, clean your room, pay your bills, and help others. Then your song will come from a purer place. You'll pick up your guitar and feel again that flush of first love you've felt so many times before." Not a bad way to become a better person and a better player.

#### 4 MEDITATE & BE GOOD TO YOUR BODY

Musicians generally spend more time exercising their ears than the rest of their bodies, but neglecting the latter can seriously affect your playing. Guitar coach Josh Brill, founder of Yoga of Guitar in Venice, California, explains that a healthy body can result in healthier guitar work. "Playing guitar is a movement and body practice first," Brill says. "We forget this because many people spend a lot of time thinking about the guitar itself, but it's the body that is actually doing the work. So how we feel in our body directly has an influence on how we play."

Exercise and a healthy diet can help provide the kind of mental clarity needed for musical ability and development. Just ask artists such as Jon Bon Jovi and Def Leppard guitarist Phil Collen, who make it a point to exercise and eat healthy even while touring. For a more invigorating experience, try meditation.

"When we meditate, we are slowing down our thoughts and clearing our mind, which leads to a greater connection and presence with that which we are playing," Brill says. "Most peoples' minds are always very busy and usually loud and kind of out of control."

Brill developed Yoga of Guitar to work with meditation and music from two directions. He teaches students to meditate while playing guitar, and to play guitar as meditation.

"Meditation is to the mind what playing scales is to the guitar," he says. "When we practice meditation just like scales, we begin to develop a relationship with movements and patterns. Through meditation we begin to literally clear more space in our head so we may focus with more clarity and an expanded attention."

#### 5 DON'T FORCE YOURSELF TO PRACTICE

Setting a practice schedule might sound great, but the monotony of it can be challenging. "If you don't feel like playing one day, that's fine," says Swedish fingerstyle guitarist Gabriella Quevedo. "I don't think it's good to have a strict schedule every day. You will become like a robot, just playing because you have to, and will forget why you're doing it."

Josh Brill notes that the *method* of practice matters, too. "It's very important to remember that *how* we practice is just as important as *what* we practice," he says. "So if we practice from a stressed mindset or physicality, that is what we'll learn as we practice."

#### 6 WRITE A LETTER TO YOUR FIRST TEACHER

Gratitude can go a long way. Peter Bolland recommends thanking those who first helped you start playing guitar. "Write a letter to

your first guitar teacher or that kid from your first band, even if they're no longer living," he says. "Whoever helped you fall in love with playing guitar. Tell them how their crazy love for music and the power of performance broke open something in you, and how you'd never be able to repay them for what they showed you. There's no better way to remind yourself why guitar playing matters."

You might find some of your own ways to rekindle your fervor for guitar—to re-capture some of the original passion and reignite your love for the instrument.

AG

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# Six Tips on Playing Fingerstyle Blues

Learn to sharpen your bass & treble voices

BY PETE MADSEN

## THE PROBLEM

You want to combine the bass and treble voices in your fingerpicked blues to add complexity.

## THE SOLUTION

Establish an alternating bass with your thumb and then use various patterns to create the treble/melody voice. A few exercises will establish the muscle memory that will help you keep track of the bass patterns played with melody. Take that pattern and turn it into a basic 12-bar blues.

Here are a few ideas for those of you who love the sound of players like Mississippi John

Hurt, Big Bill Broonzy, or any number of Delta and Piedmont blues players, but have struggled to keep the solid alternating bass lines these players employ to give their music the drive that we all love.

### 1 ESTABLISH THE BASS

First off, you will want to feel comfortable using your thumb to play an alternating bass pattern. In Ex. 1 through Ex. 9, you will be playing an open G chord. Start out by just playing the bass notes on the sixth and fourth strings with your thumb as demonstrated in Ex 1. Play those notes on the downbeat; you

should be counting “1, 2, 3, 4,” and tapping your foot. Every time you play a bass note, your foot will be striking the floor. This shouldn’t give you too much trouble, but if it does, try tapping your foot while tapping out a rhythm with your fingers on your guitar or your knee.

### 2 DEDICATE EACH PICK-HAND FINGER TO A PARTICULAR TREBLE STRING

Many original country-blues guitarists finger-picked with just their thumb (p) and index (i) fingers, but for this lesson you’ll also use your middle (m) and ring (a) fingers. This will give you more flexibility for playing other styles and



Ex. 1

Ex. 2

Ex. 3

Ex. 4

Ex. 5

G

Ex. 1: p p p p

Ex. 2: a p p p p

Ex. 3: a p p p p

Ex. 4: a p p p p

Ex. 5: p p p p

Ex. 6

Ex. 7

Ex. 8

Ex. 9

Ex. 10

Ex. 6: p p p p

Ex. 7: p p p p

Ex. 8: p p p p

Ex. 9: C

Ex. 10: a p p p p

Ex. 11

Ex. 12

Ex. 13

Ex. 11: G

Ex. 12: G

Ex. 13: G

C

G

Ex. 14: C

Ex. 15: C

Ex. 16: C

Ex. 17: G

Ex. 18: G

D

G

Ex. 19: D

Ex. 20: D

Ex. 21: D

Ex. 22: G

Ex. 23: G



## THE BASICS

help you with techniques like banjo-type rolls. Assign your index finger to string 3, middle to string 2, and ring to string 1. There will be times when you will want to alter which finger plays which string, but in the beginning it's helpful to establish this particular framework.

### 3 PLAY ON THE BEAT

In Ex. 2 to Ex. 9 keep the alternating bass, but incorporate the top three strings. Ex. 2 has us playing the first and sixth strings simultaneously

on the first beat—we call this a “pinch.” In Ex. 3, add another note in the treble voice on the third beat with the second string. And in Ex. 4, pinch notes on every beat.

### 4 PLAY IN BETWEEN THE BEAT

Now that you have warmed up with pinches on every beat, it is time to play treble notes in between the beats. In Ex. 5 you will still be playing the alternating bass between the sixth and fourth strings, but adding in the

first string between each bass note. Count “1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and” as you play this exercise. In Ex. 6 play the same rhythm but switch between different treble strings.

### 5 COMBINE PINCHES AND BETWEEN-THE-BEAT NOTES

In Ex. 7 you come to the nitty gritty of fingerpicked blues, in which you combine pinched notes and treble notes played between the beat. Remember, you are still keeping the same alternating bass pattern and everything else hangs on that. Count the rhythm: “1, 2, 3, and 4.” Pinch on the second beat and then play in between the beat on the third. Ex. 8 has you pinching on beat 1 and playing in between on 2 and 3.

For Ex. 9 through Ex. 12 you will switch to a C chord and try out the same techniques as you did for G. Ex. 9 establishes the bass pattern; Ex. 10 incorporates pinches, Ex. 11 plays in between the notes, and Ex. 12 combines pinches as well as in-between notes.

### 6 PUT IT ALL TOGETHER

Now you can play a complete 12-bar blues (Ex. 13). I have written this out so that you are playing repeating two-bar rhythmic patterns. For example, look at the first two bars of the verse, and count out the rhythm: “1, 2, 3, and 4 ... 1, 2, and 3 and 4.” That pattern repeats every two bars.

This should help anchor you as you make your way through the progression. The D chord in Ex. 9 though Ex. 12 should not give you a problem—you will be alternating open-string bass notes between the fifth and fourth strings. Keep in mind, this is a very basic pattern and as you make your way into playing songs there will be many other techniques such as hammer-ons, pull-offs, slides, and rhythmic variations that are based on melody and not patterns.

As you progress and start learning alternating-bass blues songs, try to break them down into the essential elements; warm up the left hand by just strumming the chords. Then try playing just the bass notes for a given 12-bar verse. Think of the bass pattern as the glue that holds everything together and you will be on solid ground.

*Pete Madsen is a San Francisco Bay Area-based guitarist and instructor who specializes in acoustic blues, ragtime, and slide guitar. He has authored several books of guitar instruction including A Guide to Bottleneck Slide Guitar and Improvising and Variations for Fingerstyle Blues, both available at his website: [learnbluesguitarnow.com](http://learnbluesguitarnow.com).*



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# How to Harmonize in a Chet Atkins Style

An introduction to playing chord melodies



BY RON JACKSON



**L**earning to play chord-melody style—that is, expressing melodies in chords rather than single notes—is a formidable and valuable skill. While the approach has been seen most commonly in the works of jazz and jazz-informed musicians such as Earl Klugh and Chet Atkins, it can be used to add new dimensions to virtually any style. This Weekly Workout will show you everything you need to get started harmonizing melodies, through assorted treatments of the classic tunes “London Bridge is Falling Down” and “Billy Boy.”

## WEEK ONE

A prerequisite to playing in the chord-melody style is for you to know a given melody inside out, in both your ears and your fingers—in different positions and, ideally, different keys.

## When playing chords up and down the fingerboard, slide your fretting hand fingers into the next chord.

Having a firm grasp on the melody will allow you to harmonize it more easily. Start with the melody of “London Bridge,” written in the key of G major in **Ex. 1**. Play it as notated, and then experiment with some of your own fingerings.

In **Ex. 2**, you’ll flesh out the melody with some basic open chords, falling under every other note in bars 1–3 and all of the notes in bar 4. It’s helpful to know the function of each melody note. For instance, the first note, D, is the fifth of the G chord; the second note, E, is the sixth, etc. Before you play the

example, determine the functions of the rest of the melody notes.

When you work through the example, whether fingerstyle or hybrid picking (pick and fingers), it’s important to play the melody notes louder than the other chord tones by attacking them with greater force—but not too much. Be patient, as it might take some time to get the hang of this.

You’ll place a chord under every melody note in **Ex. 3**, which uses a different approach to harmony, containing mostly diatonic triads (falling strictly within the key of G) instead of the basic I–V (G–D) progression. Note that the voices (notes) of the chords move entirely in parallel motion. Keep your fretting hand close to the strings when switching between chords. When playing chords up and down the fingerboard, slide your fretting hand fingers into the next chord.

## WEEK TWO

You don’t always need to play the melody on top of the chord. In **Ex. 4**, it’s placed in the second note from the top voice in each chord. The occasional inversion—a note other than the root in the bass—helps keep the movement between chords smooth. For instance, in bar 1, on beat 3, the G chord’s third, B, appears in the bass and ascends neatly by a half step to connect with the C chord’s root, C, on the “and” of 3.

This example is trickier to play, since the melody is in an inner voice. Try using fingerpicking or hybrid picking for this example, taking care to apply more pressure to the melody notes. To make the chords sound smoothly connected, hold each note for as long as possible. For instance, in bar 2, fret the first-string G with your fourth finger; keep that finger in place as you add your first and second fingers to play the C chord.

## Beginners’ Tip #1

In the chord-melody style, play the melody so it’s louder than the rest of the notes in a chord by applying more pressure with your pick or finger.

## Beginners’ Tip #2

Fret-hand efficiency is important in chord-melody playing. Use the least amount of motion between chords while making sure to fret them cleanly.

## Beginners’ Tip #3

Always know the function of the melody in a chord. For example, on a C chord, the melody note E is the third.





**WEEK 1**

**Ex. 1**

G D G D G

**Ex. 2**

G D D7 G D G

**Ex. 3**

G Am G Am G Am G D Em F#dim G Am G Am G Am G Am G D G

**WEEK 2**

**Ex. 4**

G C G C G C G D G D7 G C G C G C G C G D G

**Ex. 5**

G C G C G C G D G C G C G C G C G D G



## WEEK 3

## Ex. 6

F7 B $\flat$  F7

B $\flat$  F7

## Ex. 7

F7 B $\flat$ maj7 Gm7 Cm7 F7 B $\flat$ maj7 Gm7 Cm11 F7 Dm7 Gm7 Cm7 F7

Cm7 F7 Dm7 Gm7 Cm7 F7 B $\flat$

## WEEK 4

## Ex. 8

Cm9 Cdim7 B $\flat$ maj7 Bdim7 Cm7 F6 E $\flat$ 6 Dm7 $\flat$ 5 G7 G $\flat$ maj7 B7 $\sharp$ 9 Bmaj7



A close-up, vertical shot of the lower portion of an acoustic guitar. The image shows the light-colored wood grain of the body, the copper-colored metal of the strings, and a dark, rectangular bridge. The strings are strung over a small white bridge pin and are held in place by several black bridge pins. The background is a soft, out-of-focus white.

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In Ex. 5, the melody is moved to the lowest note of each chord. Accent each melody bass note by picking slightly harder against each note while rolling your pick or fingers across the strings. Be sure to mute unused strings.

### WEEK THREE

This week you'll kick things up a notch with a jazz-approved, chord-melody arrangement of "Billy Boy." But first, just as you did with "London Bridge," familiarize yourself with the melody, written in the key of B♭ major and including only the I and V chords (B♭ and F7, respectively) in Ex. 6.

Once you know "Billy Boy" in your sleep, proceed to Ex. 7, in which a chord falls squarely on each beat. As opposed to the previous exercises, you're now entirely in seventh-chord territory, with lots of interesting

harmonic moves. In bar 1, for instance, instead of just the I chord (B♭), you've got a I–vi–ii–V progression (B♭maj7–Gm7–Cm7–F7).

Don't worry about these labels if you're not a theory nerd—half of the battle in learning the chord-melody style is to focus on the technical aspects on the guitar. Practice the example one bar at a time until you've polished off the whole thing. Also, try to memorize the music, so that you can really focus on making this example sing.

### WEEK FOUR

As long as you can clearly hear the melody when you're playing in the chord-melody style, then you can throw in the kitchen sink when it comes to harmonic choices. You'll do just that this week with a radically re-harmonized rendition of "Billy Boy" (Ex. 8). A whole method book could be devoted to the harmonic techniques at play here, but again, if you're not yet up to speed, don't worry too much about the music theory in learning this example.

But if you are into theory, here are a few highlights: There are the chromatic passing chords—on bar 1, beat 2, Bdim7, which connects the B♭maj7 and Cm7 chords; in bar 3, beat 3, the A♭13 chord, bridging the A7♭13 and

## A prerequisite to playing in the chord-melody style is for you to know a given melody inside out.

G7 chords. In bar 5 is a chromatic cliché—a Cm chord is embellished as the second-highest note descends in half steps to form a quick progression of Cm–Cm(maj7)–Cm7–Cm6. Throughout, there are chords with upper extensions—those notes beyond the seventh, like the #11 and ♭13—chords that add sophistication to this simple song.

Learning this arrangement might take you more than one week. It's important to practice it thoroughly until all the chords are under your fingers. And remember to think like a singer when playing this example and in the chord-melody style in general. You might be running through a handful of harmonies, but it's all about the melody.

Ron Jackson is a New York City-based master jazz guitarist, composer, arranger, producer, and educator who's played with Taj Mahal, Jimmy McGriff, Randy Weston, Ron Carter, and many others. Find more of Jackson's lessons at [practicejazzguitar.com](http://practicejazzguitar.com).

## Beginners' Tip #4

It's important to learn chord-melody arrangements by heart, in different keys and positions. This will improve not just your knowledge of the style but your fretboard fluency in general.

### Ex. 8 Continued

The musical notation for Ex. 8 Continued consists of two systems, each with a treble clef staff and a guitar-specific staff below it. The guitar staff shows fingerings for the left hand (numbered 1-4) and the right hand (numbered 6-7). Above the treble staff, chord names are written for each measure.

**System 1 Chords:** B♭maj7, A7♭13, A♭13, G7♭13, G♭7♭13, F7, G♭dim, Bdim7, Cm, Cm(maj7), Cm7, Cm6, B7, B7♯11, A7♯11.

**System 2 Chords:** D7, A♭7♯11, Ddim7, G7♭13, Cm11♭5, F7♭9, Cdim7, Dm7, D♭6, C7, C♭maj7, B♭6.



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# Working on the Railroad

Learn to play a classic American locomotive song

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

Not long ago, Billy Bragg and Joe Henry took a long train ride, from Chicago to LA, stopping at stations to record great railroad songs (see feature, p. 42). The resulting album, *Shine a Light: Field Recordings from the Great American Railroad* (Cooking Vinyl), features “Rock Island Line”—a durable song that’s been covered by everyone from Lead Belly to Johnny Cash to Paul McCartney.

The folklorist and musicologist John Lomax recorded the earliest example of the song on a prison farm in Arkansas in 1934,

and it’s the basis for the arrangement here. This Library of Congress version is distinguished by a classic call-and-response pattern in the chorus: a leader sings a line, then the rest of the group provides an answer in unison. The original recording is a cappella, meaning without instrumental support, and the harmony is static, essentially based on one long I chord (A). I’ve added the IV and V chords (D and E, respectively) to keep you from getting bored when playing the song.

If you’re a strummer, use the basic pattern

shown here in notation; if you’re more of a fingerpicker, a basic Travis pattern works nicely. Remember to pick the notes on the bottom strings with your thumb (t) or thumb pick, and those on the highest strings with your index (i) and middle (m) fingers, letting everything ring as long as possible.

Whether you strum or fingerpick “Rock Island Line,” play it with a slight swing feel and think about a locomotive’s incessant rhythm as you work through this classic railroad song. **AC**

## ROCK ISLAND LINE

**Strumming Pattern**


Swing  
(♩ = ♩♩)

**Fingerpicking Pattern**

**Chords**


**A**

x01230




**E**

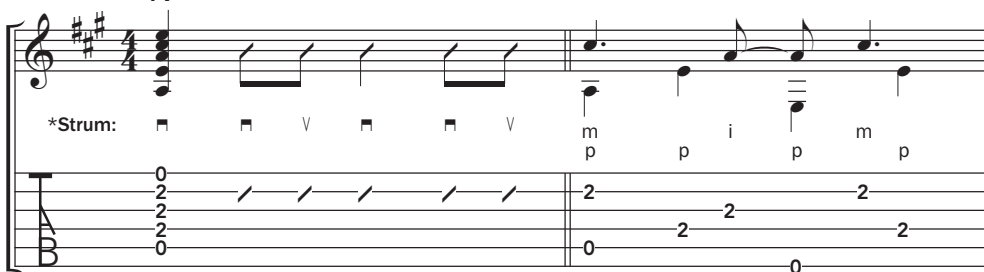
023100



**D**

xx0132





\* ♩ = down; ♩♩ = up

### Chorus

**A**

Call: I said the Rock Island Line

Response: Is a mighty good road

Call: I said the Rock Island Line

**E**

Response: Is the road to ride

**A**

Call: I said the Rock Island Line

Response: Is a mighty good road

**D**

Ensemble: If you want to ride, you gotta ride it like you find it

**E**

**A**

Buy your ticket at the station on the Rock Island Line

**A**

1. Well Jesus died to save me all of my sins

**E**

**A**

Well a glory to God we gonna meet Him again

Repeat Chorus

2. Well the train left Memphis at half past nine  
It made it to Little Rock at eight forty-nine

Repeat Chorus

3. Well Jesus died to save me all of my sins  
Well a glory to God we gonna meet Him again

Repeat Chorus

66 October 2016





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Read a Q&A with Ben Harper on p. 50

# Hello Heartache

**Ben Harper's 'She's Only Happy in the Sun' radiates**

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

**B**en Harper might be known for his formidable chops on a Weissenborn lap-slide guitar, but anyone can learn to play and sing his simple heartbreaker of a song, “She’s Only Happy in the Sun,” from his 2003 *Diamonds on the Inside* (Virgin). The album hit No. 19 on the *Billboard* Top 200 album chart. Harper built the tune—played in the key of D major—from six basic open-position chords that you may already know: the I, ii, IV, V, vi, and ♭VII (D, Em7, G5, A, Bm, and Cadd9), plus a couple of variations (D7 and Bm/A).

I’ve included a basic rhythm pattern in notation. Pick the root of the chord on beat 1 and on the “and” of beat 3; use downstrokes to

strum the upper notes of the chord on the beats and “ands,” and use upstrokes for the rest. Now, practice and internalize this pattern before proceeding to the rest of the song.

Once you’ve got the strumming pattern down, begin switching among the chords. Just as you would for any song, remember to change grips as efficiently as possible. For instance, when moving between the Em7 and G5 chords, keep your third and fourth fingers held in place.

Speaking of chords, note that on the original recording, the guitarist plays the A chord with a barre on the top four strings at the second fret—you occasionally hear the F♯ on the first string, which makes for a more colorful A6 chord.

In the last two bars of each chorus, you will disrupt the basic rhythmic pattern with a classic walk-down that connects the Cadd9 and G5 chords (shown in notation—use your first finger to catch the fifth-string B).

This is a cool ornamental technique you can use to add harmonic and rhythmic interest in almost any setting. **AC**

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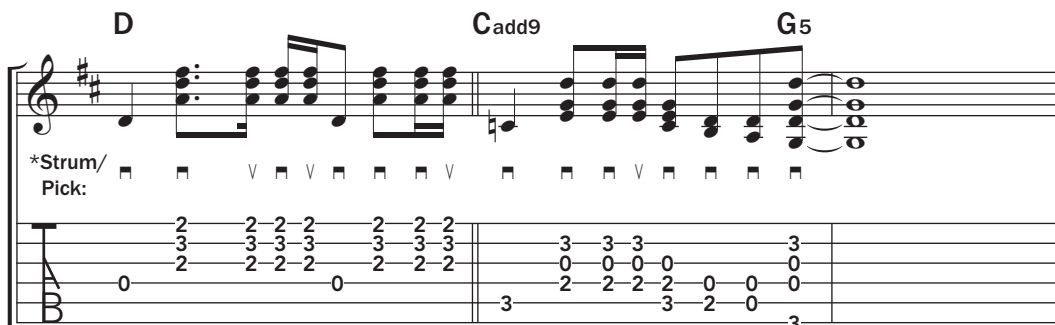
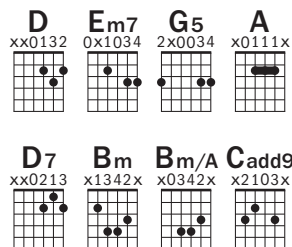
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## Strumming Pattern

## Chorus Walkdown

## Chords



\*  $\blacksquare$  = down;  $\blacktriangledup$  = up

## Intro

D

Verse 1

**D** **Em7**  
I know you may not want to see me  
**G5** **A** **D**  
On your way down from the clouds  
**Em7**  
Would you hear me if I told you  
**G** **A** **D** **D7**  
That my heart is with you now

*Chorus*

**G5**                    **A**                    **Bm**    **Bm/A**  
She's only happy in the sun

**G5**                    **A**                    **Cadd9**    **G5**  
She's only happy in the sun

2 Did you find what you were after  
The pain and the laughter brought you to your knees  
But the sun sets you free, sets you free  
You'll be free indeed

*Repeat Chorus*

3 Every time I hear you laughing  
Hear you laughing, it makes me cry  
Like the story of life, of your life  
Is hello, goodbye

*Repeat Chorus 2x*

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# Every Stitch

The 1966 Donovan classic 'Season of the Witch' gets a solo-fingerstyle makeover

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

**"S**eason of the Witch" is one of Scottish folksinger Donovan's earliest forays into gritty psychedelic rock, but the 1966 classic also makes for a cool, solo-fingerstyle arrangement.

The Halloween-ready original, released 50 years ago on the *Sunshine Superman* album, is powered by a groove-heavy repeating bass line, which you'll see in the down-stemmed notes of the notation beginning in bar 3. While the song originally was played in the key of A major, here it's in D, so that the line sounds more bass-y. This is facilitated by double drop D-tuning, in which the highest and lowest strings are tuned down a whole

step, to D. If you'd like to match the original key, just put a capo on the seventh fret. The vocal melody is in the up-stemmed notes, and so is the occasional instrumental lick. Organ fills are approximated in the pre-chorus, and an electric-guitar riff is borrowed in the interlude. This strategy gives the song an attractive polyphony.

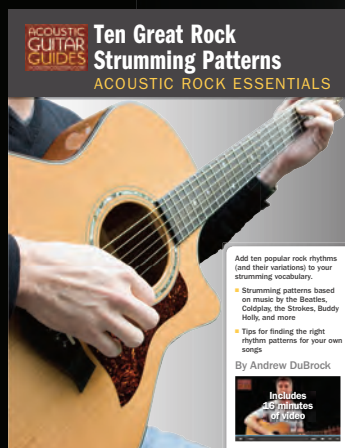
The key to this fingerstyle arrangement isn't to conceive of the music as independent horizontal lines, but as a collection of vertical snapshots. Count carefully, paying attention to where the notes are stacked, and the piece should fall into place. To distinguish the bass

notes from the other parts, try palm-muting them—rest your pick hand's palm lightly on the strings, to give the notes a slightly muffled sound. One more note: Just as I've taken liberties with the key, I've done the same with the form, in the interest of a streamlined presentation. If you're using a capo and playing along with the original recording, keep in mind that there's no interlude after the second chorus, while the one that precedes the third chorus is six bars long instead of four as notated. Likewise, feel free to take your own liberties in learning this arrangement.

AC



Donovan

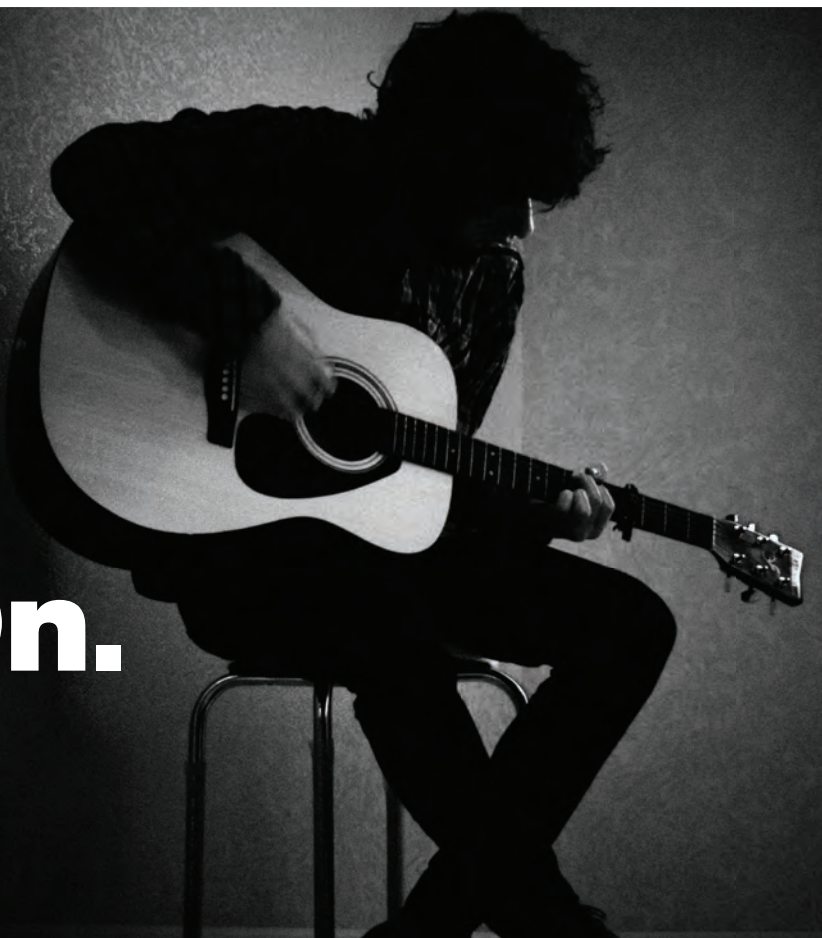


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# SEASON OF THE WITCH

BY DONOVAN LEITCH

Tuning: D A D G B D

Intro  
Moderately

Chords: D, G7, D

The intro consists of three measures. The first measure is in D major, the second in G7, and the third in D. The guitar part features a mix of chords and single notes, with a capo on the 2nd fret. The bass line is simple, mostly using open strings and single notes.

Verse

Chords: G7, D, G7

1. When I look out my win - dow,  
2.-4. See additional lyrics

The verse begins with a G7 chord, followed by a D chord. The melody is simple and easy to remember. The guitar part is mostly chords and single notes, with a capo on the 2nd fret. The bass line is simple, mostly using open strings and single notes.

Chords: D, G7, D

man - y sights to see. And when I look in my

The verse continues with a D chord, followed by a G7 chord, and then a D chord. The melody is simple and easy to remember. The guitar part is mostly chords and single notes, with a capo on the 2nd fret. The bass line is simple, mostly using open strings and single notes.

Chords: G7, D, G7

win - dow, so man - y dif - 'rent peo - ple to be.

The verse ends with a G7 chord, followed by a D chord, and then a G7 chord. The melody is simple and easy to remember. The guitar part is mostly chords and single notes, with a capo on the 2nd fret. The bass line is simple, mostly using open strings and single notes.



# SEASON OF THE WITCH

13 **D** **G7** **D** **G7**

That it's strange, \_\_\_\_\_ so strange. \_\_\_\_\_

**Pre-Chorus**

17 **D** **G7** **D**

You've got to pick up ev - 'ry \_\_\_\_\_ stitch. You've got to pick up ev - 'ry \_\_\_\_\_

20 **G7** **D** **G7**

\_\_\_\_\_ stitch. You've got to pick up ev - 'ry \_\_\_\_\_ stitch.

**Chorus**

23 **D** **Gadd9** **A** **D**

Mm, \_\_\_\_\_ hm, must be the sea - son of \_\_\_\_\_ the witch.



## Interlude

witch.

2. When I look over my shoulder  
What do you think I see  
Some other cat looking over  
His shoulder at me  
And he's strange, sure is strange

*Pre-Chorus*

You've got to pick up every stitch  
You've got to pick up every stitch, yeah  
Beatniks are out to make it rich

### 3. Instrumental

### Pre-Chorus

You've got to pick up every stitch  
The rabbit's running in the ditch  
Beatniks are out to make it rich

4. When I look out my window  
What do you think I see  
And when I look in my window  
So many different people to be  
It's strange, sure is strange

*Pre-Chorus*

You've got to pick up every stitch  
You've got to pick up every stitch  
The rabbit's running in the ditch



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84

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86

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# AG TRADE



**MAKERS & SHAKERS**

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## The Builder's Dilemma

**Is Harvey Leach a builder who does inlay, or an artist who makes guitars?**

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

About a year ago, Harvey Leach, one of the world's great acoustic-guitar luthiers, found himself confused about his professional identity. After a bit of soul-searching, he arrived at a tidy conclusion. "For many years, I thought of myself as a guitar maker who did inlay work, but then I realized that I'm actually an inlay artist who makes guitars," Leach says. "There are so many really good guitar makers these days, but maybe only a half-dozen pushing the envelope with cutting-edge inlay work, and I'd like to think I'm one."

Leach is known for his luxurious modern steel-strings, which often incorporate exotic tone-woods. Brad Paisley, Dolly Parton, and Roy Clark

all play guitars that Leach built. He also invented the idea of a travel guitar with his foldable Voyage-Air series of guitars that fit into airline overhead bins. But Leach's inlay art is even more dazzling. In 2011, Martin & Co. selected Leach to design the ornate Leonardo da Vinci-themed 1.5 millionth Martin, featuring the Mona Lisa on the headstock, the Last Supper on the pickguard, and the Vitruvian Man on the back—all in stunningly accurate detail. "My job's been trying to create very realistic inlays," Leach says.

### AN AUSPICIOUS START

Leach got into inlay years before he started making guitars. When the artist, now in his

late 50s, was in junior high school in Vermont, he wanted to learn the banjo but didn't have enough money to buy one. So, in 1972, he decided to make one, complete with fancy custom-inlay work, using a building tutorial in the book *Earl Scruggs and the 5-String Banjo*. "It would've been a lot cheaper just to have bought a banjo," Leach says, laughing. "But it definitely set me on the path for the work I do now as an inlay artist."

After he graduated from high school, in 1977, Leach did a stint in the Army as a sergeant in military intelligence. While stationed in Berlin, he worked sporadically in a





SHOKA PHOTOGRAPHY

woodshop on his first guitar. “It took me five years to make, since I didn’t really have a proper workshop till I moved back to the States,” he says.

By the mid-1980s, Leach and his wife Rebecca, whom he’d met in the Army, had settled down in her hometown of Grass Valley, California, in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Leach carved out a living by building cabinets and furniture as well as guitars and mandolins before focusing on lutherie full-time in the early 1990s. Since then, he’s worked in a converted ranch-style house on the same lot as his home.

“I have just a 700-foot commute to work,” Leach says. “And not only do I have the old house sectioned off for plenty of space to do different things in different rooms, the climate inside the shop is ideal for instrument making without even really needing any humidification or dehumidification.”

### PHOTOREALISTIC FLOURISHES

By the mid-2000s, even as Leach was getting his Voyage-Air guitars off the ground, he continued to refine his work as an inlay artist. He put his photorealistic inlays on the guitars he had built, like his *Geisha*- and *Samurai*-themed steel-strings. In addition to his work on the 1.5 millionth Martin, Leach did the inlay work on special-edition guitars by PRS and Collings. He places a premium on the tiniest of details, using not just shell, but whatever material it takes to create the hue and effect he’s going for. “On a 9/11 tribute guitar I did, I used a piece of a CD booklet that was just the right blue for one of the flags,” he says.

One of Leach’s more recent collaborations as an inlay artist is with Farida Guitars, a high-end brand by Grand Reward. The company first commissioned Leach to do inlays for a guitar commemorating the Year of the Monkey. On the fretboard, that Chinese zodiac sign is centered at

the 12th fret; a monkey at the first and second frets reaches for a guitar resting on a branch on the headstock. “It’s not nearly as detailed as my work for Martin,” he says. “But I made it as intricate as possible [for] the company to afford to sell it.” The Farida costs \$5,000 compared to the commemorative Martin’s \$100,000 price tag.

“I’ve been obsessed with creating realism for as long as I can remember, long before I cut my first inlay,” Leach says. “The driving force behind what I do is that obsession. For me, the challenge of making something look as real as possible is what inspires me and sometimes seeing it come to life is surreal. Sometimes it’s as if my hands are someone else’s or at the very least being guided by someone with a mastery of the art. Often I complete a project and sit back and think to myself, ‘Did I really do that?’”

“Every day I feel blessed to have been given this talent and in honor of that I always try to push myself and not settle for where I am now.”



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— Harry Hudson-Taylor

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## INTO THE FOLD: HOW HARVEY LEACH INVENTED THE TRAVEL GUITAR

In the early 2000s, one of Harvey Leach's customers was a frequent flier who owned a guitar that got smashed when it tumbled off an airport conveyor belt. The client, shaken, approached Leach with the idea of making a guitar that would fit into a plane's overhead bin. “I pretty much invented a travel guitar trying to come up with something for that one guy,” Leach says. “Ironically, he never bought one from me.”

Leach did see that there might be a market for a travel guitar whose neck folds onto the body. He made a handful in his shop, thinking less about their sound than their mechanics, which revolve around a proprietary hinged neck. But he was pleased with the way the instruments sounded, too.

When Leach debuted his Voyage-Air guitars at the 2006 NAMM show, he assumed the guitar's strings would have to be slackened before the neck was put into place. But guitarist Thom Bresh demonstrated that this wasn't the case. “Thom, a fantastic player who didn't have the same kind of worries as a luthier, folded the neck and then put it back together without loosening the strings,” Leach says. “Everybody just ooh'd and ah'd. I was absolutely astonished that the guitar didn't explode and that it stayed perfectly in tune the whole time.”

For the first few years, Leach made his

travel guitars one at a time by hand, but then set his sights on the mass market. He imported bodies from China and built the necks and finished the guitars in California. This wasn't cost-effective, so he began importing both the bodies and necks. Eventually, he decided to outsource the guitars entirely. “I showed the guitar to a potential builder [at a trade show] and they didn't think they'd be able to make it,” Leach says. “But funnily enough, it was the same company that had actually provided the neck and body, so basically all they had to learn was how to do the neck attachment.” The company? Grand Reward, the Chinese builder that now makes the imported series of Voyage-Air guitars. (Leach continues to make his own folding-neck guitars on a custom basis.)

At press time, Leach and Grand Reward were discussing an interesting inversion of what's becoming increasingly common: Instead of an independent luthier licensing their designs to an overseas company to produce at an affordable cost, Farida might have Leach hand-make a small selection of its guitars in his Grass Valley shop.

Whether or not the project pans out, Leach—who estimates he spends 70 percent of his time doing inlay work and 30 percent building instruments—relishes the idea of making these guitars. “I might be an inlay artist who makes guitars now,” he says, “but I'm still as excited about woodworking as I was when I made my first guitar 40 years ago.” —A.P.



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- 14th-fret neck junction
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# The Truly Acoustic Amp

Thanks to the ToneWoodAmp, the guitar effects toolbox just got smaller (and that's a good thing)

BY NATHAN BELL

Get two or more acoustic-guitar players together and the conversation inevitably turns to live sound and the search for the best way to amplify the guitar. Some, like British pop-star Ed Sheeran, prefer an altered sound, with varying combinations of pickups, effects pedals, sampling, and modeling. Others—Dakota Dave Hull comes to mind—swear by a simple microphone or two. But generally speaking, acoustic players have always had to choose between an acoustic sound or the ability to create a range of interesting effects.

This is about to change.

The revolutionary ToneWoodAmp (TWA) is a combination acoustic effect generator, DI box,

and IOS interface. It gives you the ability to play acoustically *and* to create effects—effects that up until now were only easily available through a pickup and an extensive collection of pedals.

To understand why this device is so unusual, start with the unique feature that gives the ToneWoodAmp its name. After mounting this small, portable, and easily removable amp to the back of your electro-acoustic guitar, the selection of DSP effects (reverb, delay, tremolo, auto-wah, and distortion) are broadcast through the instrument's back, where they interact with the natural sound of the guitar itself.

In effect, the body of the guitar is transformed into an amp.

The TWA does this by taking the signal from an under-saddle or soundhole pickup and combining it with the company's own effects technology to create a seamless blend of natural guitar sound and effect.

## COMPACT & SIMPLE TO MOUNT

The device is approximately the size of three iPhone S Plus handsets stacked on top of each other. It's held on to the outside back of the guitar by an X-Brace magnetic unit, which is attached via double-sided tape inside the back (you can adjust the position for sound and comfort through trial and error before applying the tape to the inside back of the guitar).



In most seated situations, you won't notice the device once it's mounted. I also tried it while standing and found that it was fairly unobtrusive. The magnets do a great job of holding the unit in place, but if you are going to leap around, I'd suggest augmenting the magnetic X-Brace unit at the site of the TWA.

One warning: these are strong magnets and people with implanted medical devices will need to position the TWA as far from the device as possible. Luckily, the TWA worked terrifically in the multiple positions I tried.

### THE EFFECTS FEATURES

In order to make use of the acoustic effects, your guitar must have either an undersaddle transducer or magnetic soundhole pickup. Internal microphones and ambient pickups will work fine for the DI and IOS interface features, but quickly cause feedback in acoustic-only mode.

The effects have depth and warmth, both when played acoustically and when used directly to an amp or PA. I found the room, reverb, and delay effects to be the equal of more expensive units. I was particularly taken with the Leslie effect which, when used judiciously, gave greater width and depth to the sound from a OO- or OM-body style.

The effects can't be stacked (yet), but each effect has three adjustable parameters that allow a range of possibilities. Combine the IOS interface and you have a staggering number of sonic options. You'll have little trouble creating personalized sounds—and you can save them through presets for quick recall. The TWA also provides notch filters that work in tandem with the effects. With the TWA, you may be able to eliminate your current preamp altogether.

### THE TEST DRIVE

After a short time, I was blending sounds from the DI effects option and the IOS option (using Sample Tank) to get a variety of beautiful, controllable sounds from my Larrivee 00-03. The effects blended seamlessly with the guitar's signal to create a live approximation of the Larrivee's natural sound and tone.

When I wanted to do something a little more tonally aggressive, I dialed in a small amount of virtual fretless bass (IOS interface) that added a subliminal low end that really brought out the swampy, gut-bucket nature of a finger-picked blues.

The TWA folks thought ahead and provided two micro-USB ports for the inevitable software updates and expansions. One of those ports is designed to allow for a remote option, so the user can switch the effects in and out.

The company even provides both right- and left-handed models, the kind of smart touch that one rarely finds in the first generation of a new product. You'll want to spring for the IOS adaptor, but all of the other cables are included with the TWA. Extra X-Braces are easy to order so you can use one TWA with multiple guitars. And if you don't already have

**I dialed in a small amount of virtual fretless bass that added a subliminal low end that really brought out the swampy, gut-bucket nature of a finger-picked blues.**



a pickup, TWA can sell you one with a modified chord for use with the unit. In addition to being easy to just take out of the box and start using (my preferred way of learning how anything works), there is a terrific online video manual with effective and clear instruction on how to set up and use the TWA as a combination multi-effect unit and DI, and how to use the IOS interface option to utilize apps like Sample Tank and Amplitube.

The ToneWoodAmp is an affordable, cutting-edge product that serves the traditional needs of the performing guitarist. It belongs in every guitarist's toolbox. In fact, you may find, as I did, that it becomes your entire toolbox.

*Nathan Bell is a singer-songwriter based in Chatanooga, Tennessee.*

## AT A GLANCE TONEWOODAMP

### SIZE

5 1/2-inches by 3 3/4-inches  
by 1 1/8-inch

### FEATURES

8 effects with 10 memory  
locations each

3 programmable parameters  
for each effect

5 guitar settings with master gain  
and 2 notch filters each

Programmable volume & gain  
for each effect

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to an amp

2 USB ports

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Torrefied Adirondack spruce top

Ebony bridge

# Time Machine

**New Martin 00-18 Authentic bears uncanny resemblance to its 85-year-old predecessor**

**BY ADAM PERLMUTTER**

I felt a deep and instant connection with Martin's 00-18 Authentic 1931. This diminutive, slope-shouldered beauty has a warm and lively voice and is extremely responsive. It's got a surprising amount of volume and projection for its size. And the guitar feels incredible, too. It weighs next to nothing and its neck offers no resistance, no

matter what kind of idea I throw at it, making it addictive to play.

## OLD-SCHOOL DETAILS

This 00-18 is one of the newest members of the Authentic series, in which Martin recreates its prewar classics in stunningly accurate detail. This particular model was patterned after a 1931 00-18 that Fred Oster, the proprietor of Vintage Instruments in Philadelphia, loaned Martin to scrutinize with X-rays and by hand.

Martin built the 00-18 Authentic 1931 in a period-correct fashion, using hide glue, and painstakingly replicated all of the details on the original instrument, from the ebony nut to the rosewood binding to a 1930s-style hang tag. The guitar's finish looks noticeably different from most new guitars. That's because the Adirondack spruce soundboard has been torrefied—that is,

baked under pressure, transforming its structure such that it resembles decades-old wood, both sonically and visually (Martin calls this thermal treatment the Vintage Tone System or VTS).

The top has a warm reddish coloring that looks more natural than a guitar that has been finished with aging toner, as is common practice these days. Then there's the nitrocellulose lacquer finish, glossy, but less so than on a typical modern guitar, and thinner, too. As it happens, Martin recently discovered the recipe for this more subdued finish, used in the early 1900s. And though the finish on this 00-18 has yet to age, it lends the guitar an excellent old-school vibe.

In another aspect that can't be seen, the neck is reinforced with an ebony dowel, rather than the now-standard truss rod. While this period-correct detail might not be adjustable, it's thought to increase the instrument's resonance.





**Top**  
Golden-Age relic brass  
side mount tuners

**Bottom**  
Mahogany back  
and sides



1 7/8-inch ebony nut



#### AT A GLANCE

## MARTIN 00-18 AUTHENTIC 1931

#### BODY

12-fret 00 size

Adirondack top with VTS

Mahogany back and sides

Ebony bridge/bone saddle

Hide-glue construction

#### NECK

Mahogany

Ebony fingerboard

24.9-inch scale

1 7/8-inch ebony nut

Golden-Age relic brass  
side-mount tuners

Vintage gloss finish

#### EXTRAS

Martin SP Lifespan 92/8  
Phosphor Bronze Light  
(MSP7100) strings (12–56)

Hardshell case

Available left-handed

#### PRICE

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Made in the USA

[martinguitar.com](http://martinguitar.com)

The artisans at Martin did a beautiful job in building this 00-18 Authentic. The finish is flawless, and feels great to the touch. Many modern guitars are made using a PLEK system (computer-controlled fret leveler), but the fretwork on the 00-18 was done by hand, and it's perfect.

Similarly, the guitar's Adirondack spruce bracing and cloth reinforcement strips are glued flawlessly, and all of the other details are meticulous as well.

#### UP FOR ANYTHING

The 00-18's neck has a subtly V shaped profile whose moderate girth should appeal to a wide range of players. The nut is relatively wide at 1 7/8 inches, and though I tend to prefer narrower nuts, it somehow doesn't feel all that wide. It's just as easy to play

barre chords and even thumb-fretted shapes on the 00-18 as it is on a guitar with a 1 11/16-inch nut. The combination of a short scale—24.9 inches—and generous string spacing feels terrific on both hands.

I didn't have the benefit of a prewar 00-18 at hand for comparison, but the Authentic does seem to have an old voice, with the sort of depth, resonance, and openness characteristic of the best vintage examples. It's got solid fundamentals and is well balanced, with firm and rich bass notes matched by clear, singing trebles.

The Authentic is a brilliant guitar for fingerpicking. It amplifies even the subtlest shifts in finger placement and velocity. And the instrument feels open to all styles. It sounds just as good for playing a Gymnopédie by the French composer Erik Satie as it does

for a ragtime arrangement or jazz standard in the chord-melody style.

It might not have the powerful bass of a good dreadnought, but the 00-18 is a great strummer, with excellent note separation and clarity. Perhaps on account of the mahogany back and sides, the sound is nice and uncluttered for chords of all qualities, with or without open strings. It'd be a terrific guitar for recording.

In the 00-18 Authentic 1931, Martin offers a beautiful time-capsule guitar that represents one of its most accurate reissues to date. Vintage aficionados will surely be impressed by its wealth of period-correct specs and by its mature-sounding voice. Historicity aside, this Martin is simply a fine and beautiful guitar—with a winning and adaptable personality—that begs to be played. **AC**

# A USB-Ready Jewel

**The Breedlove Pursuit Concert Koa is built from treasured Hawaiian tonewood**

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

One run through Mary Flowers' "My Bluebird," a blues in G major, finds Breedlove's Concert Koa to be well-suited for fingerpicking. Same with J.J. Cale's "Call Me the Breeze," with its classic shuffle pattern. The guitar's ample midrange is nice in this context, with a snap and crispness that lends itself well to palm muting.

Those are two songs that I had notated in the August issue of this magazine, and the ease and comfort of the Concert Koa with both shows this instrument can be versatile.

You can see why in the construction: It glows with intensely figured and richly colored koa and abalone purfling, and its rosette inlay work. It's a jewel of a guitar, for sure, and a highly functional tool—no big surprise coming from a forward-thinking guitar maker like Breedlove.

The Pursuit Concert Koa is the latest member of Breedlove's series of affordable guitars designed at the company's Oregon headquarters and made in China. This line of instruments, intended for players looking to branch out into gigging and recording, pairs Breedlove's signature design flourishes with Fishman electronics, including a USB output—good both for street-corner busking and capturing ideas on the fly.

However, my first tonal impression of the Concert Koa is that it doesn't sound quite as handsome as it looks. The bass feels a bit meek, and overall the guitar sounds constricted. But it seems to open up fairly quickly after I spend some time with it.

## THE TEST DRIVE

While the J.J. Cale and Flowers songs play well on this instrument—particularly the fingerpicking on "My Bluebird," which takes little effort from the pick hand to coax the tune from the guitar—it doesn't fare quite as well on Orville Johnson's interpretation of "Don't Let the Devil Ride," in open G tuned down a whole step. Some of the notes sound a little mushy, though perhaps heavier strings than the 12s it came with would bolster those lower notes.



For basic fingerpicking—despite the guitar's nut width of  $1\frac{11}{16}$  inches, as opposed to the  $1\frac{3}{4}$  that many fingerstylists prefer—the instrument is responsive to the subtleties of finger placement. Any deficiency in the bass range feels like an asset, too—the low notes don't overwhelm the interlocking patterns on Flowers' "Bluebird."

As for basic strumming in standard tuning, the Concert Koa sounds good. Though the guitar wouldn't be the best choice for hearty bluegrass accompaniment, it's easy to discern the individual members of both simple and complex chords in all regions of the neck. Flatpicked single-note lines don't have the boldest presence, but they do have a nice warmth and also benefit from a subtle natural reverb.

## USB READY

That warmth is conveyed nicely through a Fender Acoustasonic amplifier, thanks to Fishman Isys electronics, which also includes a built-in and easily readable tuner. The Fishman's USB output makes it a cinch to interface the guitar with Apple's GarageBand, where a recording novice can easily track a song and experiment with effects processing.

The guitar feels good to play, though the factory-set action could be lower—nothing a proper setup couldn't address. The neck has a relatively shallow C shape that's comfortable whether I'm playing barre chords or single-note lines. And Breedlove's trademark deep cutaway makes it easy to play notes all the way up to the 20th fret across all six strings.





Speaking of Breedlove trademarks, the Concert Koa boasts some of the same special appointments as its much costlier US-made counterparts. There's the Breedlove Bridge Truss, a rod that extends from under the bridge to the tail block, lightening the load on the top and allowing

it to vibrate more excitedly. The guitar's pinless bridge makes string changing easier while doing away with the six holes normally drilled into the soundboard to accept the bridge. The Concert Koa allows players to get these features at a fraction of the price of one of Breedlove's domestic offerings,

as well as the opportunity to purchase an affordable solid-koa top. The Pursuit's sound may not be as refined as its Breedlove counterparts, but it's an impressive gateway instrument for a player who's venturing out of beginner territory and ready to gig and record. **AG**

## AT A GLANCE

# BREEDLOVE PURSUIT CONCERT KOA

### BODY

Concert size

Solid figured-koa top

Koa back and sides

Rosewood bridge

High-gloss natural finish

### NECK

Mahogany

Rosewood fingerboard

25.5-inch scale

1 11/16-inch nut

Gold closed-gear tuners

Satin finish

### EXTRAS

D'Addario EXP16 strings  
(12-53)

Fishman ISYS+  
USB electronics

Gig bag

Lifetime limited warranty

### PRICE

\$1,332 list/\$999 street

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**NEW GEAR**



AC-GA1CE



AC-GA2CE





# The Wonder Twins

Eastman offers a pair of affordable guitars in all-solid construction

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

I am a little snobbish when it comes to instruments, but two new Eastman guitars—the AC-GA1CE and AC-GA2CE—have led me to reappraise my view of lower-priced models. Both of these all-solid-wood guitars sound robust and balanced, play exceptionally well, and come with Fishman electronics. And each carries a street price of just \$620. At first, I thought a digit might be missing from the beginning of that price, but that's not the case, making these instruments exceptional buys in a market teeming with options.

## VARIATIONS ON A THEME

The AC-GA1CE and AC-GA2CE are grand-concert models—a design splitting the difference between the dreadnought and the OM—with smooth cutaways. They're identical in every spec, save for their soundboards. The AC-GA1CE has a Sitka spruce top, while the AC-GA2CE is sapele. Both are supported by hand-carved scalloped X bracing.

The guitars show a judicious use of ornamentation, with subtly classy details, like the maple inlay of the headstock logo. But the wood is the real star: The AC-GA1CE's solid spruce soundboard's tight grains are punctuated occasionally by bear-claw figuring; the sapele on the AC-GA2CE is richly colored and has striking grain patterns.

The fit and finish of both guitars are good. All of the frets are perfectly seated and polished and the setup is dialed in nicely—there's no fret buzzing to be found on either instrument. The inlay and binding work is clean and tidy, as are the interior aspects of the guitars.

And instead of the overly thick finish found commonly on imported instruments, these instruments have an ultra-thin satin finish, without any pore filler. This treatment not only feels sleek, it likely helps the guitar's resonance.

## AGREEABLE PLAYERS

Both guitars feel much the same, though out of the box the AC-GA2CE somehow seems just a little stiff in comparison to its cohort. Both have moderately proportioned C-shaped necks with 1.75-inch nuts. The factory-set

action, low but not overly so, is easy on the fret hand, and the generous nut width makes the guitars good choices for fingerpicking.

It's not often that I get an opportunity to audition the same guitar with different tone-woods, and that's why it's so fun to compare the AC-GA1CE and AC-GA2CE in terms of their sonic performance. The solid spruce example has a bright, shimmering sound and slightly greater sustain than the sapele, which has a warmer and more direct voice—a good choice for recording.

Both guitars take equally to the plectrum and to fingerpicking. They perform just as well with brisk, open-chord strumming in standard tuning as they do to gentle fingerpicking in DADGAD.

## These instruments are exceptional buys in a market teeming with options.

And though neither has quite the resonance of some of the finest steel-strings, each guitar has great evenness between its different registers and good definition and note separation as well: attributes that make them suited to a range of styles.

## NATURAL-SOUNDING ELECTRONICS

A Fishman Sonitone preamp system comes standard on each guitar. These electronics include an under saddle pickup and thumb-wheel volume and tone controls mounted discretely under the soundboard. Plugged into a Fender Acoustasonic amplifier, the guitars sound natural, without much to speak of in the way of extraneous noise.

The quality of imported guitars has increased dramatically in recent years, but few models with all-solid construction hit all the high notes in terms of sound, playability, and craftsmanship for well under a grand. Either guitar would make a superb choice for a beginner, or even a solid go-to instrument for a working singer-songwriter. **AC**

## AT A GLANCE

### EASTMAN AC-GA1CE AND AC-GA2CE

#### BODY

14-fret grand auditorium size with cutaway

Solid Sitka spruce top on AC-GA1CE; solid sapele on AC-GA2CE

Solid sapele back and sides

Rosewood bridge

Satin open-pore finish

#### NECK

Mahogany

Rosewood fingerboard

25.4-inch scale

1.75-inch nut

Ping precision tuners

#### EXTRAS

Cleartone 7412 strings (12–53)

Bone nut and saddle

Padded gig bag

#### PRICE

\$775 each retail, \$620 street

Made in China

eastmanguitars.com

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**Playlist**  
Snétberger's  
classical fusion

90

**Playlist**  
The Stray Birds'  
create 'Magic'

90

**Playlist**  
From the charts: Top 5  
Americana albums

# MIXED MEDIA



**John Gorka**

*Before Beginning*

Red House Records

## Buried Treasures

The past catches up with  
John Gorka, in a good way

BY PAT MORAN

**B**efore *Beginning*, a recovered cache of John Gorka's earliest studio recordings from 1985, is subtitled *The Unreleased I Know*. Thirty years ago, Gorka decided to shelve these ten songs, nine of which appeared two years later as better-known versions on his official debut

album, 1987's *I Know* (Red House). He quips in the liner notes of *Before Beginning* that this collection is "the *I Know* nobody knew."

But that shouldn't tag this set of demos as a mere curio for completists.

These early versions, appearing as kind-hearted sketches and confessionals filtered through a perpetual outsider's spyglass, are no less solid than their better-known variants. Jim Rooney's production adds ribbons of pure-toned electric guitar and arching alto saxophone in an amalgam of neo-traditional country and E Street Band-style rock.

It's crowded, but the production sells the songs. "Down in Milltown," for example, chugging at an accelerated pace through

swooping pedal steel and Gorka's spiraling acoustic guitar, is burnished and tight. "I Know" boasts serpentine guitars and rim-shot percussion, while "Blues Palace" slips Gorka's percussive acoustic and fine-grained baritone between coiling stabs of electric guitar. In contrast, the surreal gem "Branching Out," where Gorka imagines himself as a tree, is stripped down and direct.

Had Gorka released *Before Beginning* as planned, it would have been a solid start. He's confident here and his songs soar. Only he knows why they needed to take another tack. But in revisiting his false start, Gorka gives us the opportunity to hear once-familiar tunes with fresh ears.

AC





**Ferenc Snétberger**  
*In Concert*  
ECM

**A striking third-wave jazz-and-classical fusion from a Hungarian guitarist**

**B**lame it on Bach. Hungarian guitarist Ferenc Snétberger was well-versed in the jazz guitar of Jim Hall and Django Reinhardt, as well as such bebop legends as John Coltrane and Charlie Parker, when he heard the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. The impact of that encounter, he has said, changed his life. This ECM debut, recorded live in the Grand Hall of the Liszt Academy in Budapest, bears witness to that encounter. For the most part, Snétberger solos on a nylon-string guitar throughout the eight-part original instrumental “Budapest, displaying a dizzying array of technique and styles while commanding a calm center. The only additional material is an arrangement of the Harold Arlen classic “Somewhere Over the Rainbow.”

It’s easy to hear the influence of Jim Hall in Snétberger’s more straight-ahead jazz playing, and it’s tempting at times to compare him to former ECM guitarist Pat Metheny, another Hall acolyte. But Snétberger’s command of flamenco, Gypsy jazz, and other styles, his ability to stitch these together so seamlessly, and the deceptively effortless manner in which he plays make it clear that this is a singular talent. That is especially evident in the quietest moments, on Budapest, Part 3, for example, in which Snétberger captivates the listener with his sweet lyrical style.

The live concert sounds, coughing and other extraneous noise, can be a bit distracting, but ultimately the sound of one mad genius and his nylon-string guitar reels you back in. I’m looking forward to his quieter follow-up studio recording.

—Greg Cahill

## TOP 5 BLUEGRASS SONGS

- |                                                                                        |                                                               |                                                                   |                                                               |                                                            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. ‘The Train That Carried My Girl From Town’<br><b>EARLS OF LEISCTER</b><br>(Rounder) | 2. ‘Dig In The Dirt’<br><b>THE FARM HANDS</b><br>(Pinecastle) | 3. ‘I’m Dreaming of You’<br><b>THE BOXCARS</b><br>(Mountain Home) | 4. ‘Carolina Wind’<br><b>IRENE KELLEY</b><br>(Mountain Fever) | 5. ‘I Am A Drifter’<br><b>VOLUME 5</b><br>(Mountain Fever) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|

Source: *Bluegrass Today*, 8/1/2016

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**AVETT BROTHERS**  
(American/  
Republic)

2. *Colvin & Earle*  
**SHAWN COLVIN & STEVE EARLE**  
(Fantasy/  
Concord)

3. *Mudcrutch*  
**MUDCRUTCH**  
(Reprise)

4. *Exodus Of Venus*  
**ELIZABETH COOK**  
(Agent Love/  
Thirty Tigers)

5. *Undercurrent*  
**SARAH JAROSZ**  
(Sugar Hill/  
Concord)

Source: Americana Music Association, 7/25/2016



## The Stray Birds

*Magic Fire*

Yep Roc

**The Stray Birds explore a wider tonal palette on latest band album**

The Stray Birds take flight beyond their acoustic string-band origins on *Magic Fire*, while retaining ties to bluegrass, folk, and the rock-ribbed populism that's defined their identity since the core trio of Maya de Vitry and Oliver Craven (guitars and fiddles), and Charlie Muench (bass), started playing together in 2010. The fluid drumming of recent recruit Shane Leonard is not the only new sound on this set. Soaring three-part harmonies are more present than previously, and the trio is augmented with warm electric piano, rolling gospel organ, and the frequent spider's crawl of electric guitar.

Acoustics remain the bedrock of these progressive Americana tunes. The first sound on the record is Craven's jangly 1950s Gibson, kicking off bittersweet fiddle and hymnal harmonies on the stately "Shining in the Distance." De Vitry's incessant strummed Huss and Dalton acoustic falls like hard rain among skirling fiddle on the pro-labor dispatch "Hands of Man."

The band extends its reach to haunting jazz pop on "Radio," where Craven's coiling resonator ripples under de Vitry's ethereal vocal free-fall. "Where You Come From" flies furthest afield, fusing a cyclical, syncopated drums-and-acoustic guitar open to a full-blooded, country-rock ramble.

Despite their successful experiments, the Stray Bird's roots still show. When de Vitry sings, "Take my guitar from the empty hall. Don't let it hang from some rich man's wall," on "When I Die," it's clear that the band's egalitarian passion still burns brightly.

—P.M.

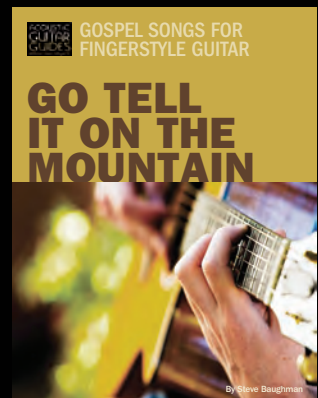
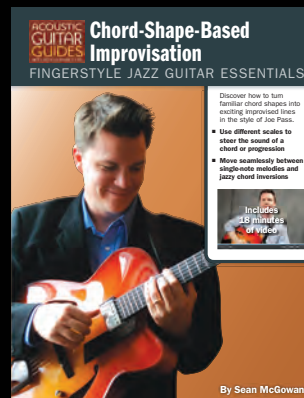
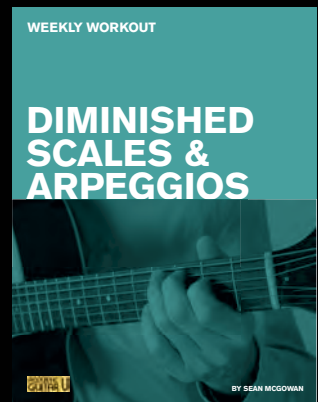
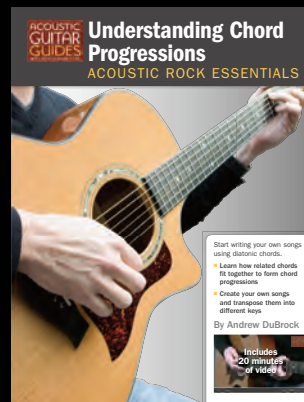
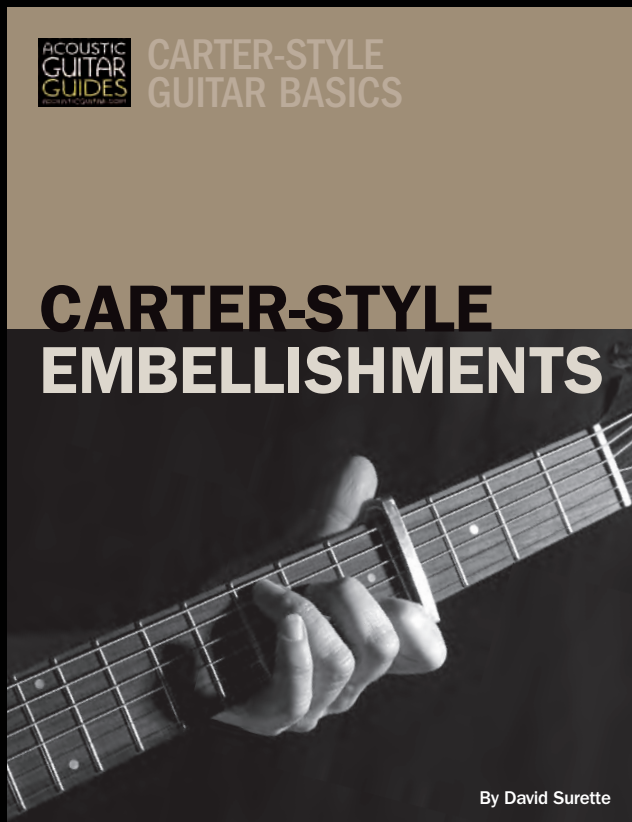
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# Head's Up

**The Outhouse Guitar has the whiff of rare tonewood**

BY GREG CAHILL

First, let's state the obvious: the Mike Franks Outhouse Guitar is a 14-fret dreadnought patterned after the classic Martin HD-28. Oh, and it's festooned with inlay depicting an outhouse, a moonshine jug, a mouse, a crescent moon, corn cobs, and an unwinding mother-of-pearl roll of toilet paper running down the fretboard. Ironically, back in the days before indoor plumbing and toilet paper became readily available, folks sometimes used an old Sears & Roebuck catalog in place of toilet paper. Sometimes those pages were festooned with images of guitars.

Also obvious is that this Rochester Hills, Michigan, guitar builder is a whimsical soul—Franks' "Bee" guitar appeared in this department in January.

Less obvious is that the rare Brazilian rosewood used on the back, sides, and head-plate was salvaged from an old, abandoned outhouse in Brazil.

The rest of the construction features a bear-claw figured Adirondack red-spruce top; forward-shifted, red-spruce bracing; a high-flamed Honduran mahogany neck; vintage pre-war style herringbone top purfling; wood-and-fiber style-28 rosette; ebony fretboard and long-saddle bridge; Waverly tuning machines; grained ivoroid binding; Evo gold fretwire; and a bone nut, end pin, and bridge pins.

What does Franks, who is flush with ideas, have to say about his one-of-a-kind creation?

"It's guaranteed to attract attention!" he quips. **AC**

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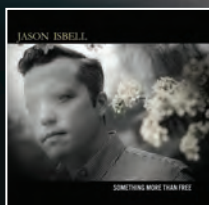
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